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Teaching and Learning in an Undergraduate Business Context: An Inquiry into Lecturers' Conceptions of Teaching and their Students' Conceptions of Learning

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ABSTRACT

During one of the many discussions that I often have with my classes, it became apparent to me that some students had varied views regarding teaching and learning. In fact, what was basically a good teaching practice to me, apparently to many of my students it was not so. At the same time, in the last few years lecturers began expressing their disappointment concerning their students' outcomes and their evident lack of interest as regards their introductory courses.

This creates some of the most immediate challenges for lecturers and teacher education designers to question the purpose of their teaching and the ways in which they teach. Indeed, what is the aim of university and college teaching and how should it be carried out?

The study explored the conceptions of learning and teaching brought by a group of Cypriot students and their lecturers in their everyday introductory Business courses, carried out in one of the three largest private colleges of Nicosia, Cyprus. Data was gathered through interviews with five lecturers and 12 students in one of the three departments of the college, the School of Business, and analysed using the phenomenographic approach. I was inspired by this approach whilst reviewing the literature outlined in many of the studies and found it to be most appropriate for my own research. I needed a method which explores the views of the participants themselves and not those of myself as the researcher, a method which aims to describe the experiences of the respondents (Trigwell, K. 2000) and attempts to make sense of their conceptions.

On the basis of analyses of the data, six conceptions of teaching and six conceptions of learning were identified. It was possible to summarise the conceptions under distinct levels of categories. A three - set - order categorisation of teaching and a two – set - order categorisation of learning

were developed. Comparisons were made between the two sets of categories. The findings showed that most participants developed comparatively traditional conceptions of both learning and teaching in a limited range of categories. Relationships between the categories indicated interesting similarities worth exploring further.

The overall aim of the research is to offer a more defined understanding of the students' early conceptions of their learning and the lecturers' conceptions of teaching those students. More specifically the research aims: first, to identify the lecturers' conceptions of teaching and whether there is a difference of perceptions between different courses; second, to develop an understanding of how students in their initial courses conceive their learning and how this affects their studies in the introductory courses, specifically in the field of Business; thirdly to examine the possibility of probable comparisons between the two sets of categories; fourthly to identify possible opportunities and problems in the development and design of future teacher education and training programmes and, finally, to provide a forum for lecturers to share teaching experiences.

DECLARATION

I confirm that this dissertation is my original work. It does not contain material previously presented for the award of a degree in this, or any other University.

Signed ……..

Despina Varnava-Marouchou

October 2007

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.2 Introduction

My interest for this research was sparked by my personal experience in the academic life of a local private college in Cyprus for the last sixteen years. In my everyday job as a lecturer of Business Studies and student advisor, I was constantly reminded of the differences in the ways students thought about their learning and lecturers thought about their teaching. This was evident by the ever-increasing complaints made by lecturers regarding their students' poor outcomes and consequently poor grades. More recently, many of them have also raised concerns regarding their students' noticeable lack of interest in their courses, which is reflected in their poor attendance. A question one may ask is: 'Why do students learn differently or face different learning problems when they seem to have the same classroom experience?' Our students go through what appears to be the same teaching exposure and yet have vastly different learning perceptions (Biggs, 1999). This forms some of the most immediate challenges for lecturers, calling them to question the ways in which they teach. Understanding how lecturers think about teaching, how they actually teach and what they see as important in terms of student learning (Samuelowicz and Bain, 1992) is crucial for future staff and course development. It is also equally important that we understand how our students learn, what they conceive learning to be and how this relates to the lecturers' own perception of teaching. Perry (1970) explained that complexities associated with student learning were perhaps due to the mismatch between their own 'absolute' conceptions of learning and the 'relativistic' conceptions held by their lecturers.

Despite the fact that recent research has revealed major differences between how students view their learning and how their lecturers view their teaching, little attention has been paid over the years to understanding these differences and their implication for designing successful learning environments (Liyan Song et al., 2006). Indeed, the need for cultivating a teaching/learning culture that pays much closer attention to the different ways in which different people learn most effectively is more apparent now than ever before. In Cyprus, such research has not even started. It is hoped that the present study will initiate similar studies in higher education.

In light of this, the first aim of this research is to investigate the Business lecturers' different ways of experiencing, presenting and managing their subject matter. The second aim is to study the different ways students experience and understand their subject matter, and the third is to explore the possibility of feasible relationships between these different types of experiences.

After this brief introduction, I shall proceed with the background context of this study. A brief background to the Cyprus education system is provided as further proof for the rationale and significance of the research. This is followed by a brief explanation of the definition of terms. The reason for conducting the research and the significance of the study is also outlined. Finally, the importance of reflexivity is acknowledged, as it relates to major data and analytical issues throughout the thesis.

1.2 The Background

Concern about the quality of teaching and learning in higher education institutions is not new even though the present emphasis on 'excellence' and 'accountability' may sometimes make it appear so. Whatever improvements we have seen in the 21st century, apparently little has changed in the quality of student learning in higher education. However, in recent years, significant efforts have been made by researchers and educators to readdress this issue. The growing field of research of student learning, for example, has produced many suggestions as to what lecturers should be doing to promote quality learning amongst their students. Indeed, governments and institutions in many countries have directed large amounts of money into improving teaching and learning practices.

Many of these studies, nevertheless, have concentrated on criticising such practices. Criticisms as to the quality of graduates, and therefore the quality of teaching in universities and colleges, have been voiced by several critics throughout the world: in America (Bedford et al., 1986) and Australia (Mathews et al., 1990) and even here in Cyprus (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2003). The underlying theme of these reports has been the concern that most graduates lack the very qualities consistent with the aims and purposes of higher education. Despite overwhelming dissatisfaction, especially in the area of Business students' learning (particularly in the field of Accounting and Management), possible explanations for these problems have not been fully explored (Lucas, 2000).

Many education researchers (Entwistle and Tait, 1990; Trigwell and Prosser, 1991) have turned to consider variables consistent with student and lecturer behaviour. More specifically, they

consider any possible links that may exist between their teaching and learning beliefs and their classroom practices. Evidence has been explored supporting the debate that students tend to organise their learning behaviour according to their conceptions of learning within their particular subject area (Entwistle and Ramsden, 1983; Marton and Saljo, 1984; Van Rossum and Schenk, 1984; Entwistle and Waterston, 1988; and Ramsden, 1989).

Research has shown that lecturers, too, possess a vast selection of complicated conceptions about pedagogical issues, including conceptions about their students' learning and their teaching practices (Berliner, 1987; Borg, 1998, 2003; Burns, 1992; Shavelson and Stern, 1981). These conceptions are said to form a structured set of principles and are derived from a variety of sources including the lecturer's own personality and his/her prior experiences (Borg, 2003). Such conceptions often act as a filter through which teaching methods and instructional decisions are made (Farrell, 2005; Shavelson and Stern, 1981; Tillema, 2000).

An effort is made in the present study to address these issues by examining how both lecturers and students, especially at the initial stages of their education, understand and experience their subject matter. As noted by Quinlan (1999), 'we still know little about the complexities of the educational beliefs that lecturers and their students bring to their teaching in higher education' (447).

An attempt is also made to explore any possible relations between the lecturers' conceptions of teaching, and how these relate to their students' conceptions of learning and then their academic achievement (Kember and Gow, 1994). At the same time, such data could also be used to identify

students whose conceptions are not in agreement with what the lecturers are likely to expect of them, making them 'at risk' of failure (Meyer and Shanahan, 1999). Appropriate support could then be provided for these students (Meyer and Shanahan, 2000).

This study aims to tackle the lack of information and research regarding teaching and learning in the higher education sector of Cyprus, and most specifically the private sector. The results may provide local educators with valuable insights, which can be used to both review and develop the quality of learning achieved especially within introductory Business courses. I would also like to illustrate how some of these results might be used to improve the quality of teacher training and education programmes.

1.3 Higher Education in Cyprus

The higher education sector in Cyprus is quite young. The country's sole university - the University of Cyprus - has been operating since the beginning of the 1990s. The other higher education institute, the Higher Institute of Technology, offers technical programmes and is also financed by the government. The latter is currently undergoing major changes to become a Technical University, hopefully by the end of 2007. Besides these, there are several private colleges, which have been in existence for over twenty years but have only recently had their programmes accredited officially by the government. It is estimated that by September 2007, they will also be granted university status. The programmes of these private colleges are subject to accreditation by the Cyprus Council for the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications, (Kypriako Symvoulio Anagnoris Titlon Spoudon), known as KYSATS. KYSATS's main function is to make decisions on issues of recognition of diplomas and certificates. This is the

country's equivalent to ENIC/NARIC (European Network of Information Centres/National Academic Recognition Information Centres) authority for the evaluation and recognition of foreign qualifications.

Education is perhaps the greatest achievement of Cyprus since independence in 1960. Given the small population of the island, and the lack of natural resources, there has been a collective determination to promote intellectual achievements (Persianis, 1981). By the 1970s, the traditional occupations such as farming, agriculture and industry-related jobs, were giving way to 'new' occupations requiring professional skills and training (Vakis, 1990). The introduction of new technology created more professional/managerial positions, and an increasing proportion of Cypriots opted for higher education in an effort to secure non-manual employment positions (Demedriades, 1985). By 2006, the number of students attending higher education had soared to 20,340, an increase of 10% from previous years (Department of Statistics and Research, 05/06).

It was actually the absence of a university, prior to 1992, on the one hand, and the growing demand for higher education on the other, that led to the creation of private colleges. The majority of these colleges are quite small, with only 400 to 600 students. The largest of these are Cyprus College, Frederick Polytechnic and Intercollege. The total number of students attending these colleges amounts to 58% of all the students attending higher education in Cyprus (Statistics of Education 05/06). Cyprus College (where I am employed) holds approximately 4000 students. Until recently, all colleges were largely teaching-focused (Eliophotou-Menon, 2003). However, as a result of their programmes being accredited, a few of the colleges have now invested heavily

in research. Cyprus College, for example, created a new department of Research and Development in 2000.

Cyprus College was founded in 1961. The Business Department- now known as the Ioannis Gregoriou School of Business - was the first to be created. In 1984, the School of Computer Science was added, followed by the School of Humanities and Social Science in 1989. The College usually offers 2- to 4-year courses, specialising in degree and vocationally oriented fields such as Business Administration, Accounting, Computer Science, Hotel and Catering and Secretarial Studies. In 1998, the School of Professional Studies was formed, offering courses leading to professional qualifications. Since 1987, the college has also offered Masters degrees, such as the Master of Business Administration. Recently, other courses have been added, such as the European and Educational Studies and Music Education Studies.

The college is affiliated with foreign universities, and its examinations are often associated with overseas examining bodies, such as the Arkansas State University and Central Michigan University in USA, and Lancaster and Kingston Universities in the UK. All programmes at the college are modular and based on credits. The credit-point system corresponds to 15 credits for a semester and 30 credits for a full academic year.

Most recently, in January 2006, the college joined with an international network of universities, the Laureate. The Laureate Network of Universities covers 24 recognised academic institutions in the USA, UK, Spain, France, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Brazil, Chile, Mexico, China and now Cyprus. Finally, the official language of instruction of the college is English.

Because of the relatively short existence of academia in Cyprus, research regarding learning and teaching in higher education has been very limited, and in the private sector, it is still almost non-existent. My research aims to provide a starting point to fill this gap.

The research has taken place in the Business department of the college, the Ioannis Gregoriou School of Business. The research study involved students and lecturers taking the core introductory courses of Marketing (MAR 101), Economics (ECO 101), Management (MGT 101) and Accounting (ACC101), often referred to under the umbrella of 'Business Studies'.

1.4 Definition of Terms

In this study, I seek to gain an understanding of the lecturers' and students' conceptions of teaching and learning with the aim of improving teaching practices and teacher education programmes and hence the quality of teaching and ultimately student learning**.** It is important, therefore, to clearly define the main terms that are used throughout the study.

One of the difficulties in studying conceptions in general, is that there is no consistent vocabulary used by researchers in the field. A conception is a general term used to describe views, experiences, beliefs, knowledge, preferences, mental images, and other similar aspects of a lecturer's and student's mental structure. It is, therefore, difficult to give a general definition of the term. Its definition in the literature, however, consists of 'an inclusive body of knowledge about an idea or a phenomenon'. In other words, a conception describes the way a person conceives a phenomenon and this may influence an individual's actions (Freeman and Richards, 1993). A conception, as Larsson, (1984: 126) explains, 'is the unit of description to use when you

want to characterise how things appear'. Similarly, Pratt (1992: 204) stated that 'we view the world through the lenses of our conceptions, interpreting and acting in accordance with our understanding of the world'. Consequently, conceptions influence the way people act in their particular situation which is in accordance with these conceptions.

Previously, researchers attempted to differentiate between different aspects of teachers' thinking. Many studies made the effort to distinguish between teacher knowledge and teachers' beliefs (Calderhead, 1996). Many researchers, however, have stated that such distinctions are neither helpful nor possible. They have, instead, resolved to adopt the term 'conceptions', which is used to describe a more general mental structure that involves beliefs, knowledge, mental images, preferences and similar aspects of cognition (Thompson, 1992).

Other definitions for 'conceptions of teaching' have been used by various researchers, such as: 'personal theory of teaching' (Fox, 1983), 'beliefs of teaching' (Pajares, 1992) and 'intention of teaching' (Trigwell et al., 1994). Although there are slight differences between the meanings of these terms, they are viewed as parallel alternatives to the term 'conceptions of teaching' (Kember, 1997). Another term, 'orientation of teaching', was introduced by Kember and Gow (1994) to refer to a broader area of conceptions based on a multi-level model of teaching conceptions. Clandinin and Connelly (1987: 488) referred to this lack of agreement in definitions between the researchers as 'simply different words naming the same thing'. Kember's distinction between the term 'conception' and 'orientation' will be borrowed, to some extent, in this research to describe the general views about teaching and learning.

Furthermore, this research adopts the phenomenographic point of view, in which the term 'conception' is usually used synonymously with the 'way of experiencing'. In other words, a conception consists of referential (meaning) and structural aspects. For example, a lecturer's conceptions of teaching describe the way in which he/she views teaching (Larsson, 1983). It reflects the relation between the lecturer and his/her teaching experience (Marton, 1981). One would argue here that the same principles apply for the term 'conceptions of learning'.

Finally, the term 'higher education' is used extensively to describe college or university level education.

1.5 Reasons for Conducting the Research

The underlying aim of the research is to understand what learning is like from the students' and lecturers' own perspectives. The results may provide guidance to lecturers and educators on what aspects of teaching and learning we need to improve and not be limited to just improving exams and tests. Thus, the research is about changing aspects of organisational structures, of pedagogic practice, and teacher-student or student-student relationships, in ways that make sense to young people and help them to learn (Rudduck TLRP Teaching and Learning Research Programme 2000-2003). The research findings will also contribute to the design of teacher education programmes and curriculum development, specifically for higher education institutes.

Certainly, a great deal of research has been carried out worldwide into how teaching affects learning, but it appears that the results have not been taken up in university departments.

This is partly, Entwistle (2003) maintains, because research is usually published in education journals using Social Science jargon, and partly because the findings cannot be applied equally well to the wide variety of disciplines (Entwistle, ELP project, 2003). The current study makes an attempt to generate ideas about teaching and learning that are the direct result of interviews with lecturers and students in several core subject areas within the Business department.

As already stated, very limited research has been undertaken regarding students and their lecturers in higher education and none in the private colleges of Cyprus. The few studies that have been carried out, have concentrated on the 'views' of the teachers rather than their 'conceptions' and have totally excluded the students' conceptions (Eliophotou-Menon, 2003). Most of the research has concentrated on primary and secondary school education. There is a general feeling that education researchers in Cyprus do not seem to respond to the widely recognised complexities of teaching and learning in higher education. Many researchers seem to focus on making their findings and suggestions applicable to the entire education system of Cyprus (Angelides et al., 2004), paying little attention to issues specific to the higher education sector (Papanastasiou, 2000; Valanides, 1997).

Indeed, context-specific research is necessary at a time when higher education in Cyprus is faced with multiple internal and external pressures from the government and employers, from social economic and technological changes, and finally from the changing demands of our students. The first pressure is from the Cyprus government. As mentioned earlier, Cyprus College will be granted university status by September 2007. This implies that there will be increasing demands to improve the quality of teaching and to make university lecturers more accountable. In its effort

to gain university status, the college has been faced with an added problem: that of continuous accreditation, which consequently demands the constant improvement in the standard of the quality of education being offered to an ever-increasing number of students.

Indeed, the expansion of learning beyond secondary school level to everyone has reached new records in the Cyprus education arena. Despite the fact that 78% of all school leavers attend higher education institutions, few attempts have been made to examine how these students learn or the quality of the learning experience which higher education is meant to provide. Due to the enormous expenses attached to studying abroad, more and more students are attending the local institutes. This year alone, there has been a 20% increase in student enrolment compared to last year (Cyprus College Statistics, 2006). This poses another responsibility for the local colleges to provide high quality education.

Furthermore, the increasing demand for higher education in Cyprus has created some added unforeseen challenges. A large number of students now come from different backgrounds and have different learning experiences, expectations and aspirations. The 'Net Generation' or the 'Millennial Generation' students are now bringing their own unique demands into their Business classes. They have grown up expecting to stay connected to a customer-focused, instant, 24-hour, 7- day a week service, (Karns, 2005). In addition, over the last twelve years or so, Cyprus has been accepting students from abroad, especially China, India and, most recently, from the European Union. All these changes taken together make today's undergraduates harder to teach and less tolerant of indifferent teaching (Ramsden, 2003).

In addition, rapid advances in technology necessitate the creation of very different learning and teaching experiences for students and lecturers alike. Business Studies educators have seen an explosion of new information technologies used in, or even replacing, the classroom as we know it, with online discussions and e-courses, (Atwong and Hugstad,1997; Benbunan-Fich et al., 2001; Celsi andWolfinbarger, 2002; Karns and Pharr, 2001; Lincoln, 2001 and Karns, 2005). We have to be constantly aware that our present world is forever changing and is characterised by uncertainty and complexity (Barnett, 2000). It is a world where college and university lecturers are constantly expected to improve the quality of their teaching and their students' learning outcomes (Taylor, 1999). These pressures form the inevitable setting of any debate regarding better university teaching.

Moreover, the world of work in particular is changing rapidly with increased globalisation transforming the economic systems of the 21st century. Market places are now international rather than local, as information technology has created independent workplaces (Giddens, 2000). Added to this, the changed economic circumstances have increased employment flexibility and mobility and reduced continuity of employment, with graduates expecting several career changes during their working life. Education for life, together with the development of the students' capacity to think (Cyprus College mission statement), is perceived as critical for the new social order, and is a dominant feature of university and college mission statements (Candy, 1991; Cropley 1979). Thus it is becoming increasingly obvious that education institutes may have to prepare students for largely unknown future careers (Bowden and Marton 1998). Students are supposed to graduate with degrees or diplomas applicable to the needs of both current and future

jobs. They need lifelong learning skills to allow them to get used to the unknown circumstances they may have to face in their future lives (Stephens et al., 1998; Kelly et al., 1999).

The Business students, in particular, are required to be well prepared to function professionally in an increasingly complex economy. Understanding the educational implications of the global business setting requires lecturers to prepare students to cope with the forces that direct today's world economy that would allow them to become more effective, problem-solving individuals. Business education is becoming a complicated endeavour that involves a dispersed network of places and institutions. This means that a different course syllabus, which goes beyond that of the traditional discipline-based university course, may have to be adopted. It is now becoming clearer that it is no longer enough for lecturers to be experts in the knowledge of their discipline or profession, and to teach it in the usual traditional ways. Lecturers need to learn how to teach, how to work in multi-disciplinary teams and how to promote student inquiry and research.

Higher education institutes in Cyprus are under increasing pressures to maintain a competitive edge in the international, local and academic market place. Institutes offering Business courses, for example, are under specific pressures to be competitive. At the same time, administrators and educators are investigating new ways to improve and increase academic achievements but with less funding and investment (Martin, 1999). There is also a clear tendency for local colleges to become more customer-oriented, particularly as they charge expensive fees which they have to justify. Demands on Business Schools for more efficient results stems also from the increasing demands made on the business profession in general.

The demands on the Business department of the college to turn out more and more professionals, and to provide a variety of different programmes, are quite obvious. In the last five years alone, we have added three more programmes to the traditional ones of Marketing, Accounting, Economics and Management. These are Sport Management, graphics and design and Hospitality Management. These pressures are often reflected back to lecturers who are teaching greater numbers of students with fewer contact hours and more administrative duties (Martin, 1999). At the same time, lecturers are expected to be more efficient in taking on these new and expanded roles (Taylor, 1999). Faculty members also feel the increasing need to maintain their own professional development and to keep up with the constantly changing standards and regulations of the Business world. We are often reminded of this at our departmental meetings. Thus, the evaluation and continuous improvement in the quality of teaching and learning in higher education is an issue of on-going concern.

Moreover, meaningful intercultural exchanges among faculty and students are becoming increasingly essential, especially amongst the countries of the European Union, of which Cyprus has been a member since 2004. However, little is known about the influence culture and traditions have on the beliefs and experiences of local students and their lecturers. In the absence of local research and development, it is almost a practice here to embrace educational teaching practices, theories and policies coming from Western countries, especially from Greece. As rightly stated by Bush and Qiang (2000), it is unrealistic to adopt a universalistic set of principles for teaching/learning in higher education as suitable for all cultures. It is time to start adopting a culturally sensitive perspective in the local higher education. There is clearly a need for more sensitive approaches to the process and practices of teaching and learning (Bush and Qiang,

2000; Bush, Qiang, and Fang, 1998; Crossley and Broadfoot, 1992; Dimmock and Walker, 1998b; Hughes, 1990).

Previous research into university academics' conceptions of teaching, has provided a substantial body of information of university lecturers' conceptions (for example, Dall'alba, 1990; Dunking, 1990: Dunkin and Precian, 1992; Fox; 1983; Gow and Kember, 1994; Martin and Bella, 1990; Martin and Ramsden, 1992: Pratt, 1992; Prosser et al., 1994; Samuelowicz and Bain, 1992; Trigwell et al., 1994). Many of them have concluded that teachers and lecturers approach their teaching either 'as teacher-focused,' with the aim of transferring information to students, or as 'student- focused' with the aim of developing and/or changing their students' understanding (Prosser et al., 2005). The question that remains unanswered is: 'Why do some lecturers become capable of experiencing teaching as 'student – focused', whilst others maintain 'teacher – focused' perspectives'? This creates an additional incentive for the present research, which stems from the pressing need to understand such relationships.

As a concluding note for this section, it is acknowledged that improving education through research can be achieved in many different ways. Entwhistle (1997a: 11) discusses how the purpose of educational research has moved from 'research which has sought to predict subsequent academic performance, to those which have attempted to describe students' experiences of higher education'. This is accompanied by a shift in the research paradigm, from an 'agricultural-botanical experimental paradigm' (Entwhistle 1997a: 14), in which students are assumed to respond to educational initiatives like plants to fertilisers, towards a paradigm which tries to understand the culture of a group of people. This paradigm shift has created the starting

point of this research and is clearly emphasised by Ramsden (1987), who states that research should be 'closely linked to a real teaching and learning context, in order that research findings can be used by teachers to encourage the changes they want to see in students' (Ramsden, 1987: 281).

Research to date on student learning in Business education remains limited, despite a clear need for research to be conducted within specific disciplinary settings (Lucas, 2000). One such setting is the setting described within this chapter.

1.6 Significance of this Study

It is hoped that this study will provide a baseline to allow other local researchers to continue investigations into the conceptions and beliefs about the teaching of Business Studies and other academic courses in the Cyprus higher education system. It can provide, for example, curriculum developers and teacher education designers with useful information which can determine what type of training programmes and staff development should be offered to lecturers. Consequently, the intention of this research is to:

- Identify and explore the lecturers' conceptions of teaching in the introductory Business courses.
- Identify and explore the students' conceptions of learning in the introductory Business courses.

- Examine the possibility of any evidence linking lecturers' conceptions of teaching to students' conceptions of learning and how this may contribute to the development of teacher education programmes, particular for higher education.
- Examine how these conceptions relate to previous research studies.

This study will address the need for more systematic and coherent information on the conceptions of teaching and learning, and it will provide an in-depth contribution to answering three main research questions:

1. How do Cypriot students and their lecturers conceptualise learning and teaching in a local educational context?
2. What are the qualitatively different ways in which lecturers and students conceive their teaching and learning?
3. What is the main relationship (if any) between the conceptions of learning and the conceptions of teaching?

This study is the first qualitative research to investigate both students' and lecturers' conceptions of learning and teaching in higher education in Cyprus. It is significant in filling a gap of in-depth empirical data regarding Cypriot educators' and their students' conceptions. It aims to generate qualitative insights into the influence the traditional culture of students and lecturers has on their perceptions of teaching and learning. In that, it emphasises the influence of the Cypriot contexts upon the educational conceptions of the participants. It also emphasises the much needed appreciation of local contexts in designing local teacher training and education

programmes. Such an in-depth investigation has the potential to inform other international and European research studies.

1.7 Demonstrating Self-Reflexivity within the Research Study

Finally, I believe that the quality of this thesis will be enhanced if self-reflexivity is demonstrated throughout, specifically in the areas of data collection and data analysis. In other words, I will attempt to reflect on my own beliefs and where I stand in relation to the beliefs expressed by the participants in the study.

To set the scene for the following chapters I shall now briefly examine the idea of reflexivity, and describe the context within which my research was undertaken. Throughout the thesis I argue for the central and critical role reflexivity plays in research, with the aim of developing and strengthening not only our understanding of 'what' we do in education research, but also of 'how' and 'why' we do it.

Self-reflexivity, otherwise known as critical reflexivity, acknowledges our role as researchers in the research processes, meaning that, 'how' knowledge is acquired, organised, and interpreted is relevant to 'what' the claims are' (Altheide and Johnson, 1998). In other words, it emphasises the importance of our becoming consciously aware of these processes (Fonow and Cook 1991) by thinking through them during the research. I believe the benefits of these critical reflections on my research have been enormous.

In conclusion, therefore, it is safe to say that reflexivity entails looking into how a researcher generates knowledge within the research process - which kinds of factors impinge on the researcher's construction of knowledge and how these influences are revealed in the planning, conducting and writing-up of the research.

1.8 Organisation of the Thesis

The thesis comprises twelve chapters. Chapter 1 is the introduction to the thesis setting out the main reasons for conducting the study, as well as the significance of the research in the higher education system of Cyprus.

Chapters 2 and 3 set out the general background and the theoretical principles on which this study is based, by reviewing the literature available of the teaching and learning conceptions of lecturers and students.

Chapter 4 discusses the general philosophical framework of the research and outlines the choice of research paradigms. It explains the research methodology and clarifies how the study was performed. It also outlines the qualitative approach of the research, the framework and the methods used for collecting qualitative data.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 concentrate on how the data of the research was processed and analysed, starting with the lecturers and then the students.

Chapters 8, 9 and 10 provide the main discussion of the research study, based first on the findings from the lecturers, and then the students. In Chapter 10, an attempt is made to compare the conceptions of teaching with the conceptions of learning.

Chapter 11 outlines the implications of the research findings, paying particular attention to teacher education.

Chapter 12 makes a brief summary of the findings and concludes the major points. The main limitations of the study are discussed and recommendations for further research studies are outlined.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

LECTURERS' CONCEPTIONS OF TEACHING

2.1 Introduction

The Literature Review of the thesis is divided into two chapters. Chapter 2 reviews the literature of the lecturers' conceptions of teaching, whilst Chapter 3 examines the literature of the students' conceptions of learning. This chapter presents a theoretical background for the research study based on previous literature of the conceptions of teaching. It first describes the epistemological and phenomenographic perspectives of teaching, and secondly, it outlines the literature that is significant and relevant to this particular research. The different dimensions of previous findings are outlined, whilst at the same time, the major points of agreements are emphasised.

2.2 The Epistemological Perspectives of Teaching

A growing body of research provides evidence that epistemological beliefs have offered insights as to how lecturers promote their teaching across educational settings. Epistemological beliefs are concerned with the views which individuals have about the nature and acquisition of knowledge (Bendixen, Dunkle and Schraw, 1994). They refer to individuals' conceptions about the nature of knowing. Throughout their everyday interactions, lecturers have to make decisions that are probably affected by these beliefs (Chan and Eliott, 2004).

Thus, epistemology, and in particular personal epistemological beliefs (as referred to by Schommer, 1994), reflect the individuals' views about how knowledge is gained, and the degree of certainty with which knowledge can be held (Brownlee and Berthelsen, 2006).

Epistemology stems from the Greek word *epistimi* (meaning knowledge) and *logos* (meaning explanation) and is an area of philosophy concerned with the nature and justification of human knowledge. From Plato's 'Theaetetus Dialogue' onwards, the question of what knowledge is, or what constitutes knowledge, has been a major area of philosophical inquiry.

The landscape of epistemology has long been of interest to philosophers. In past years, however, the interest has also been shared by psychologists and educationalists. The investigation into the individual development of conceptions of knowledge was fundamental to the work of Piaget (1950) and has grown in past years. The views that people have about knowledge has been the focus of many research studies, for example: Kardash and Howell (2000); Kardash and Scholes (1996); Qian and Alvermann, 2000); Schommer (1990, 1998) concentrated on epistemological beliefs. King and Kitchener (1994); Kitchener (1986); Kitchener and King (1981) investigated ways of knowing, whereas Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule, (1986) and Clinchy (1995) were concerned with reflective judgement. Baxter Magolda (1992, 1996); Baxter Magolda and Porterfield (1985) and Perry (1970) explored epistemological reflection, and most recently, Hammer and Elby (2002) talked of epistemological resources.

Such 'beliefs' appear to play an influential role in lecturers' judgements about what knowledge is relevant to a particular situation (Pajares, 1992). From this, it can be concluded that there may be a direct relationship between the lecturers' epistemological beliefs and their beliefs or

conceptions of teaching. Identification of such a relationship could be valuable in supporting the arguments that the lecturers' theoretical frameworks are beliefs- driven (Marland, 1995, 1998). Through the years, many studies have demonstrated that there are definite links between these concepts (Brown and Rose, 1995; Kagan, 1992; Nespor, 1987).

In Chapter 3, Perry's (1970) contribution to the field of epistemological beliefs and knowledge is outlined. In order to avoid repeating Perry's work here, even though it could equally apply in this chapter, parallel arguments are explored using Schommer's (1994) work. As in Perry's research, Schommer's personal epistemological beliefs vary from 'naive' to 'sophisticated'. For example, a lecturer who holds naive epistemologies generally believes that knowledge is simple, clear and specific, whilst learning ability is innate and fixed. A lecturer who holds sophisticated beliefs will believe that knowledge is complex, uncertain and tentative, and can only be gradually constructed by the learner (Howard, McGee, Schwartz, and Purcell, (2000); Schommer, (1994). Schommer's (1990) dimensions of epistemology are evident in many studies (for example, Samuelowiciz and Bain, 1992).

Findings by Hashweh (1996) stated that teachers who held constructivist or sophisticated beliefs were more likely to encourage students' conceptual change than teachers who held more dualistic or naive beliefs. On the same note, White (2000) found that teachers who hold naive epistemological beliefs tended to have a simplistic view of classroom problems. In contrast, teachers with more sophisticated epistemological beliefs were more likely to see complexity in classroom problems and seek out alternative viewpoints. Similarly, Brownlee (2001, 2003) illustrated that individuals with relativistic (sophisticated) beliefs were more able to conceive of

teaching as facilitating, rather than transmitting knowledge. Arredondo and Rucinski (1996) also reported in their findings that teachers with relativistic beliefs were more democratic, empathetic and efficient in their teaching methods. Nevertheless, research of conceptions about the nature of knowledge and epistemological beliefs are still unexplored, despite the fact that there is an increased interest in understanding how lecturers' conceptions affect their classroom practices (Hofer and Pintrich, 1997; Prawat, 1992).

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2 .3 The Phenomenographic Perspectives of Teaching

The phenomenographic perspective, which is the approach followed by the thesis, is outlined in Chapter 3 and more specifically in Chapter 4. From the above argument, it follows that the non-dualistic view of the phenomenographic approach and the epistemological approach are compatible - in that the emphasis is placed on the importance of understanding the lecturers' conceptions of their own experiences of how to improve their teaching. This is in line with all those phenomenographic studies, taking a second-order perspective (Marton, 1981; Marton and Booth, 1997). The second-order perspective considers the object of study to be the way in which lecturers experience the phenomena of teaching and not the phenomena itself. The following section concentrates on the conceptions of teaching and reviews the literature from mainly the phenomenographic perspective, including some other relevant qualitative studies.

2.4 Review of Literature of Conceptions of Teaching

As already established in the previous chapter, research into students' and lecturers' conceptions is relatively recent and has not yet produced a common framework, although there is some agreement between the findings in the literature (Gow and kember, 1993; Samuelowich and Bain, 1992). Clearly, however, research into the conceptions of teaching has yet to mature fully, and there is undoubtedly a need to debate the methodologies used, more extensively. Because of this, there may have been a tendency to use findings of students' conceptions of learning to inform research regarding lecturers' conceptions of teaching. Research into the latter has not been as extensive as the research into students' conceptions of learning. Indeed, as indicated in Chapter 3, there has been a substantial amount of research of learning in higher education, relating it to the way students experience and approach their studies and how this affects the quality of their learning outcomes (Marton, 1988; Van Rossum and Schenk, 1984; Prosser and Millar, 1989; Trigwell and Prosser, 1991). However, research into the way university lecturers conceive teaching and how this relates to the way they approach their teaching, remains limited and unexplored.

It may be helpful to point out at this stage, that some of the research of the lecturers' conceptions runs parallel to that of the students' conceptions, and on many occasions they overlap. Particular effort has been made to emphasise the main themes whilst, at the same time, trying not to repeat what has already been said in Chapter 3.

Research of teaching conceptions has its beginnings in two main areas. The first was based on the school teachers 'thinking about teaching' (Clark and Peterson, 1986; Pajares, 1992), and the

second was aimed at understanding teaching from the perspective of the teachers themselves. Although results from both of these areas represented a shift away from behavioural and cognitive research, there were, however, substantial theoretical and methodological differences between them.

Studies undertaken in earlier years with school teachers were mainly influenced by cognitive psychology. Findings implied that teachers' thinking is perceived and affects their actions which, in turn, influence their students' achievement (Clark and Peterson; 1986, Entwistle, Skinner, Entwistle and Orr, 2000). Such aspects of teachers' thinking included planning, decision-making, beliefs and implicit theories of teaching. Clearly, these studies, constructed in the late 1970s and early 1980s, did not focus on building a conceptual framework of teachers' overall views of teaching, nor did they try to give general descriptions of how teachers perceived teaching as a phenomenon. Rather, they focused on explaining the teachers' perceptions of teaching on the basis of pre-set theories.

Studies undertaken within the second-order perspective - that is, understanding teaching from the perspective of the teachers themselves - is characterised mainly by a non-dualist perspective. It focuses on the experiences of the teachers in particular situations (Prosser and Trigwell, 1999). These studies centred mostly on the differences in conceptions of teaching mainly through the use of phenomenographic research approaches. As in the case of the teacher-thinking research, this approach has also explored relations between beliefs, practices and student learning. However, this area is still underdeveloped and needs further investigation, especially in the higher education sector. For example, Bennett, Dunne and Carre (2000) have recently criticised

studies of the lecturers' conceptions of teaching as being over-simplistic when compared to the extensive school-based research which has been carried out in recent years.

Furthermore, there are important differences between the conceptions of teaching held by university lecturers and those of school teachers, linked both to their professional training and the context in which they operate (Boulton-Lewis, Smith, McCrindle, Burnett, and Campbell, 2001). To begin with, many university lecturers do not consider themselves as essentially teachers, but rather as experts in a particular subject (Kember, 1997). More specifically, they consider themselves as members of their discipline (Becher, 1989). Universities also operate under quite different value systems and traditions from schools. Whilst some elements of the school-based research may be applicable to university teaching, others are probably not.

The increasing pressures to improve the quality of teaching in universities in Europe and Australia in the late 1980s (Watkins, 1997) stimulated research of lecturers' conceptions of teaching. Some of the studies explored the relationships between conceptions of teaching and learning, approaches to teaching and learning and student outcomes, (Gow and Kember, 1993; Prosser, Trigwell and Taylor 1994; Samuelwicz and Bain1992). Many studies have described the themes of research in terms of 'personal theories of teaching' (Fox, 1983), whilst others focused their investigation on the 'orientations' and 'beliefs' about teaching (Samuelowicz and Bain, 2001; Kember and Gow, 1994). Another group of researchers concentrated on 'teaching approaches' (Trigwell et al.' 1994; Murray and Macdonald, 1997; Martin, Prosser, Trigwell, Ramsden and Benjamin , 2000), whereas others based their research on 'conceptions of teaching' (Larsson, 1983; Dall'Alba 1991; Martin and Balla, 1991). Many of these studies (Dall'Alba,

1990; Dunkin, 1990; Dunkin and Precian, 1992; Fox, 1983; Gow and Kember, 1993; Martin and Ramsden, 1992; Pratt, 1992; Prosser et al., 1994; Smuelowicz and Bain, 1992; Trigwell, et al., 1994) concentrated exclusively on exploring university lecturers' own conceptions of teaching. They focused on building a conceptual framework of teaching conceptions (see Table 2.1).

Although the literature gives an insight into how lecturers conceptualise teaching, it creates at the same time, a confusing display of information, making it difficult to manage and interpret the data. One way of making comparisons easier and thus assisting the understanding of the findings is to divide the data into the main dimensions found in the literature.

Some of the most relevant dimensions found in previous phenomenographic literature, which are also important to the concept and idea of this study, are as follows:

- The conceptions of teaching are experienced in a limited number of categories. These categories are organised in a consequence of events – often arranged in a hierarchy.
- Conceptions are predominately distinguished between teacher-centred and student-centred orientations.
- Research of conceptions of teaching is mostly restricted to Western countries.
- Findings are centred across different disciplines, but mainly Science. The Business Studies disciplines are still under researched.

The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to produce a meaningful review which analyses and evaluates all four features found in a substantial number of independent research studies, and tries to establish the main commonalities and/or differences between them.

2.5 Categories of Conceptions of Teaching

First, many phenomenographic studies have repeatedly shown that conceptions can be experienced in a limited number of qualitatively different ways known as categories, (Marton, 1981). The number of categories in the literature which describes lecturers' conceptions varies from two (Gow and Kember, 1993) to seven (Samuelowicz and Bain, 2001), see Table 2.1.

There are, however, differing opinions as to the relationship between these categories. For example, Dall'Alba (1991) and Martin and Balla (1991) use the term 'hierarchy' in discussing these relationships, where categories steadily progress from lower-level to higher-level categories. Samuelowicz and Bain (1992) suggested, however, that a hierarchical ordering implies that conception characteristics presented in lower-order categories are presented in all other categories. It is not always clear whether the other authors intended to use the term in this way.

At a very general level, the categories found in the literature are similar to some extent, and this inevitably provides some evidence of their validity (Samuelowicz and Bain, 1992). Although the number of categories differs from researcher to researcher and from country to country, in most studies it was found that, on the one hand, teaching is imparting and transmitting information and, on the other, it is constructed as helping students to develop. In other words, the

literature revealed a two-level synthesis compromising two broad teaching categories, known as teacher-centred and student-centred conceptions (Lindblom-Ylänne, Trigwell, Nevgi and Ashwin 2006; Trigwell, Prosser and Waterhouse, 1999; Samuelwicz and Bain, 1992; 2001; Kember, 1997).

2.5.1. Teacher-centred/Student -centred categories

The teacher-centred categories are distinguished by a number of features that are consistent across studies. Lecturers who approach their teaching in this manner see teaching mainly as the transmission of knowledge. These lecturers concentrate on the content of the subject and on what they do in teaching. Thus, the emphasis is on how to organise, structure and present the course content in a way that is easier for the students to understand. These categories focus on the need to identify and relate to the students' existing levels of understandings. On the other hand, lecturers whose approach is categorised as student-centred, see teaching as supporting conceptual change in their students. These lecturers focus on encouraging students to construct their own knowledge and understanding, and to activate their existing conceptions (Samuelowicz and Bain, 1992, 2001; Prosser et al., 1994; Trigwell and Prosser, 1996b), (see Table 2.1)

Most of the findings talked also of a 'middle or intermediate category'. These are, however, less defined; they are termed as encouraging learning (Martin and Balla, 1991), or helping facilitating understanding (Samuelowicz and Bain1992), and assisting students in developing concepts (Prosser et al., 1994). But the nature of this 'intermediate category' and the respective roles of teachers and students have not been sufficiently researched. It is clear that this area needs further investigation. It is important to state, however, that some researchers such as Samuelowicz and

Bain (2001) have subsequently challenged the idea of an intermediate conceptual category, suggesting that all conceptions of teaching are primarily teacher-centred or student-centred. Thus, not all studies include categories of this kind.

A good way to start describing the teaching conception categories is perhaps to use Kembers' (1997) extensive evaluation and investigation of thirteen and later fourteen research studies. Kember classified all the studies under five categories as: imparting information, transmitting structured knowledge, student-teacher interaction, facilitating understanding and conceptual change/ intellectual development. He then summarised these categories in a three-level model as: 'teacher-centred' and 'student-centred' with a middle category which he described as 'student - teacher interaction/apprenticeship'. The only exception in Kember's (1997) summary was the 'social reform' category - seeking a better society, conception - identified by Pratt (1992). In his study of 253 adult learners/educators in five countries (Canada, China, Hong Kong, Singapore and the United States of America), Pratt regarded his 'social reform' conception as uncommon, at least for academics within Western universities.

Martin and Balla (1991) found three general categories of teaching conceptions in a continuum from teacher-centred to student-centred (see Table 2.1). According to Kember (1997), these varied from teacher-content/delivery to student-learning activity/experience.

In their interview of 13 lecturers, Samuelowicz and Bain (1992) described five conceptions of teaching and found that these conceptions also ranged from teacher-centred activities to student-centred interactions. In a more recent study, Samuelowicz and Bain (2001) added two more

conceptions to their original list (see Table 2.1), those of ‘preventing misunderstandings’ and ‘negotiating understanding’.

Most relevant to the present study are Samuelowicz and Bain’s additional findings. They found that several teachers expressed, in their study, different conceptions of teaching between undergraduate and graduate levels. Conceptions of teaching at the undergraduate level appeared to be lower in the hierarchy (viewing teaching as transmission of information). Conceptions of teaching at the graduate level appeared to be higher in the hierarchy (viewing teaching as facilitating conceptual change). Similarly, Prosser et al. (1994) reported that teachers of Science courses were more likely to report higher conceptions of teaching than teachers of introductory courses for Science degrees. In her study of twenty lecturers, Dall’Alba (1991) found seven different conceptions (see Table 2.1). The first three conceptions have been described as teacher-focused whilst the last four centred on students’ activity (Boulton-Lewis et al., 2001). (See Table 2.1).

Fox (1983) proposed a model which is similar to that of Kember's, but offered a matrix view which has the potential of allowing the disciplinary element to emerge more fully. He identified several personal `theories of teaching' held by lecturers. He uses the term `theory' in the same sense as the term `conception'. One aspect of Fox's matrix is that it identifies conceptions as either teacher-controlled or student-centred. (See Table 2.1).

Gow and Kember (1993) used interviews as well as questionnaires to study university lecturers and found two teaching conceptions: ‘learning facilitation’ and ‘knowledge transmission’. They

described learning facilitation as being characterised by 'lecturers who conceive of teaching as a facilitative process to help students develop problem-solving skills and critical thinking abilities' (Gow and Kember, 1993: 28). In contrast, knowledge transmission orientation was characterised by a focus on the subject rather than on student learning (Boulton-Lewis et al., 2001). Larsson (1983) also reported similar findings. The results were later confirmed by Kember and Kwan (2000).

Similarly, Gao (1998), using the same methods in his research in Guangdong, China, found five conceptions ranging from knowledge delivery to conduct guidance. Conduct guidance is taken to mean 'helping students to become knowledgeable people with good conduct' (266). Trigwell and Prosser (1996a, b) also developed questionnaires to collect qualitative data and used statistical techniques to reflect and validate the qualitative findings of five conceptions by exploring relations between teaching conceptions and student learning.

The results showed evidence of the influences of the conceptions on planning and teaching methods, and on the quality of student learning (Gow and Kember, 1993 and Prosser et al., 1994). Such studies underscore the value of further research into conceptions of teaching and the effect they may have on student learning. This is the focal point of this study.

Table 2.1. Conceptions of Teaching - Literature Review

Authors	Date	Country	Disciplines	Methodology	Findings/categories	Interviews
Larsson	1983			Phenomenography	Transmition of knowledge Facilitating Learning	
Fox	1983	U.K			Transfer Shaping Building Travelling Growing	Polytechnic teachers
Dall'Alba	1991	Australia	Medicine/ Physics/ English	Phenomenography	Presenting Information/transmitting Inf Connecting theory to practice Developing concepts/developing capacity to be experts Exploring ways of understanding Bringing about conceptual change	20 teachers
Martin and Bella	1991	Australia	Staff develop course	Phenomenography	Presenting Information Encouraging active learning Relating teaching to learning	13 lecturers
Samuelowicz and Bain	1992	UK Australia	Science social-Science		Imparting information Transmitting knowledge Facilitating Understanding Changing students' conceptions Supporting students' learning	13 lecturers
Pratt	1992	Canada		Phenomenography	Delivery content Modelling ways of being	253 teachers

		China				
		Hong Kong			Cultivating the intellect	
		US			Facilitating personal agency	
Martin and Ramsend	1992/3	Australia		Modified Phenomenography	Presenting content of process Organising content/or process Organising learning environment Facilitating understanding through engagement with content and process	13 lecturers
Gow and Kember	1993				Knowledge transmission	
Kember and Gow	1994	Hong Kong			Learning facilitation	39 lecturers
Trigwell , Prosser & Taylor	1994	Australia	physical Science	Phenomenography	Transmitting concepts/transmitting teachers' knowledge Helping students acquire concepts/helping students acquire teachers' knowledge Helping students develop concepts Helping students change concepts	24 lecturers
Trigwell , Prosser & Taylor Trigwell and Prosser	1996a 1996b	Australia	Chemistry	Phenomenography	Information transmission/teacher-focused Concept acquisition/teacher-focused Concept acquisition/student-teacher interaction Conceptual development/student-focused Conceptual change/students-focused	24 teachers
Kember	1997	Hong Kong		Synthesis of literature	Imparting information Transmitting structured knowledge Student-teacher interaction Facilitating understanding conceptual change intellectual development	

Gao	1998	China	Physics	Knowledge delivery Examination preparation ability development attitude promotion Conduct guidance	18 teachers
Prosser and Trigwell Prosser et. al.	1999 1994		Physics Chemistry	Transmitting concepts of the syllabus Transmitting the teachers knowledge Helping students to acquire concepts of the syllabus Helping students to acquire teachers' knowledge Helping students to develop conceptions Helping students to change conceptions	24 lecturers
Samuelowicz and Bain	2001		wide range of disciplines	Imparting information Transmitting structure knowledge Providing and facilitating understanding Helping students develop expertise Preventing misunderstandings Negotiating Understanding Encouraging knowledge creation	39 teachers

2.6 Cross -Culture Perspectives of Conceptions of Teaching

Most of the research into conceptions of teaching has taken place in the 'Western' hemisphere with all that this implies. It has been predominately concentrated in countries such as Sweden, the Netherlands and the UK (Fox, 1983), but has also stretched across the world to include Australia and the USA (Samuelowicz and Bain, 1992). In the past twenty years or so, more and more studies have come from China and Hong Kong (Pratt, 1992; Kember, 1997) indicating some useful findings, which are most relevant to this particular study. Some aspects of teachers' conceptions (as in the case of learning) are consistent across contexts, but others differ according to the culture (Pratt, 1992; Trigwell et al., 1994).

Pratt (1992b) identified five different conceptions of teaching in Hong Kong, China and Singapore, and commented that they are attached to social, cultural, historical and personal realms of meaning. Thus, according to Pratt, teaching means different things depending on one's values and one's culture. There has been very little research undertaken to include cultures in the Eastern Mediterranean part of Europe, which includes Cyprus.

Watkins (1997) compared teaching conceptions in the so-called 'Western' and 'non-Western' cultures. He pointed out that most of the conceptions of teaching found in Western cultures are universal. For example, the knowledge transmission conception can be found in both Western and Asian teachers. However, some other conceptions were found to emerge in one culture, but not the other. For instance, many Asian teachers consider promoting their students' moral conduct a salient aspect of teaching, but this was seldom taken into account by most Western researchers. For example, fostering good behaviour amongst students is

particularly important in countries such as China, but it is less so for Western teachers (Gao, 1998). Pratt (1992b) found that in China teaching was conceived as the delivery of content, but also as the development of character. Both of these have a particular type of relationship between them. The first set of conceptions positions teachers as transmitters of knowledge, and the second establishes teachers as role models bearing particular values, especially in character building. In fact, Gao's (1998) fourth and fifth conceptions: 'attitude promotion' and 'conduct guidance' clearly supported this view.

Another research characteristic found in non-Western countries was the importance teachers placed on examination preparation. In his study of conceptions of teaching in Chinese secondary schools, Gao (1998) found that teachers focused extensively upon students' examination results, which he described as the conception of 'examination preparation'.

As with conceptions of learning, conceptions of teaching and their relation to culture have only just recently begun to be explored in non-Western countries and have not yet reached Cyprus. This study is aware of these gaps in the literature and has sought to address them.

2.7 Disciplinary Perspectives of Conceptions of Teaching

A critical review of relevant research indicates that lecturers' conceptions of teaching may be specific to particular disciplinary contexts. Thus, the Business introductory courses may yield their own unique domain of teaching conceptions. According to Ylijoki (2000), the core of each discipline can be conceptualised as a moral order which defines the basic beliefs, values and norms of the local culture. Previous research findings have been criticised for being too generic, applying to all teaching contexts, irrespective of the discipline (Lucas, 2002).

The studies into the different ways in which educators understand their subject include both secondary teachers (Patrick, 1998) and university academics (Martin, Prosser, Trigwell, Lueckenhausen, and Ramsden 2001; Rovio-Johansson, 1999). All studies have found that teachers within the same discipline have different understandings of the nature of that discipline, and this influences what and how they teach. Yet, despite these claims, the conceptions lecturers have about their disciplines have not been adequately researched, especially in the field of Business Studies in higher education. However, although research has been limited, several studies have explored the epistemological beliefs of different disciplines.

Based on cultural and epistemological differences, Becher (1989) established the concept of 'academic tribes', centred on Biglan's (1973) categories of disciplines, namely 'pure hard' and 'pure soft', 'applied hard' and 'applied soft'. Within these categories, the area of Business Studies may be classified as 'being in the middle' of the two sets of 'hard' and 'soft' (Corder, 1990). In his research Lueddeke (2003) showed, that teachers who teach in the 'hard' disciplines, such as medicine and the Physical Sciences, were more likely to apply a teacher-centred approach to teaching, whereas teachers from 'soft' disciplines such as Social Sciences were more likely to use a more student-centred approach to teaching. Similarly, Trigwell (2002), in a study of design and physical Sciences teachers, indicated that these teachers were considerably more student-centred than Science teachers.

Of the research that does exist, the majority is limited to the Science disciplines, specifically in the areas of Mathematics, Physics and Science education in general (Abd-El-Khalick,

1998; Bell, Lederman, and Abd-El-Khalick, 2000; Brickhouse, 1990; Hodson, 1993; Lederman and Zeidler, 1987; Anderson and Renstrom , 1979; Lerman, 1983; Fisher, 1990; Thompson, 1992). In their research of Science teaching, Simith and Neale (1989) indicated that a teacher who conceptualises Science as a collection of facts and formulae, saw teaching as a transmission of this knowledge to students. In this case, students were expected to be passive learners, read their notes and textbook, and memorise their answers. In a research study of Physics teachers, Patrick (1998) also found that teachers who view Physics as the calculation of mathematical relationships, placed an importance on managing and remembering formulae (Leveson, 2004). Another study concerning three junior high school Mathematics teachers found similar findings (Thompson, 1984). In contrast, teachers who viewed their subject as a process of inquiry, saw the need for students to be active participants in the learning process (Leveson, 2004). For example, Patrick (1998) found that Physics teachers, who saw the subject as an explanatory system involving scientific observation and experimentation, focused their teaching on applying Physics theory to measurement, prediction and problem- solving.

In keeping with this study's focus on Business courses within the higher education sector, it was considered appropriate that a few words are said about Business lecturers in general and Business lecturers at Cyprus College in particular.

2.7.1 Business Lecturers: Epistemological Beliefs and Identity

Becher's (1989) work has been influential in sketching out the academic 'tribes' who make up the world of higher education. There is still only limited understanding of academic communities in the newer disciplinary areas. The small amount of research that exists in

Business subjects is concentrated in the areas of Economics and Accounting. Marton and Dahlgren (1976), for instance, studied students' descriptions of concepts of Economics (for example, the law of diminishing marginal return). Dahlgren (1984), Pong (1999) and later Pang (2002), studied the 'price' concept in Economics, whilst Lucas (2000) explored the 'balance sheet' concept in Accounting. Although some of their observations have been confirmed by research in other disciplines, there is a need for further investigation within this area. The field of Business, as a university discipline, for example, needs to be understood as an area mainly consisting of career academics with disciplinary roots sometimes in other more traditional areas (Macfarlane, 1998).

The majority of Business lecturers at Cyprus College come from the more mature disciplinary communities of Economics, Finance, Accounting and even Philosophy. The disciplinary background of Business lecturers is very important in understanding their attitudes to both teaching and epistemology.

In common with other new disciplines, Business has faced a variety of criticisms. These have included criticism of its lack of a distinct epistemological identity (Weir, 1993; O'Hear, 1988; Barnett, 1990). For example, whilst an ethical dimension is clearly associated with other professional fields, such as medicine and law, the relationship between business and ethics is uncertain (Davies, 1993; Macfarlane, 1998). This is because Business lecturers are often associated with values which, for many critics, may represent the abstraction of institutional autonomy as an ingredient of academic freedom (Moodie, 1996). This stems from the general perception that Business departments have close links with industry and as such, are wary of introducing business values into higher education. Barnett (1990), for example,

argues that Business Studies is linked to the interests of the business community, whilst O'Hear (1988) argues that Business and Management lecturers are followers of free-market values who undermine the autonomy of higher education. In short, there is a sense of contradiction between Business lecturers, apparently acting as representatives for business values, and the established liberal values of the so-called 'Western university' (Macfarlane, 1998).

Thus, whilst engineers may be viewed as 'unexciting conformists' and sociologists as 'left-wing', Business lecturers are seen as 'right-wing' followers of commercial and business interests (Macfarlane, 1998). However, this impression is based on perceptions of Business as a subject area, and does little to expand our understanding of Business as an academic community. Lecturers derive their sense of identity from being 'economists', or 'accountants'. Few think of themselves as 'Business' lecturers per se. Business, therefore, needs to be understood as an 'umbrella' for a number of 'academic tribes' (Becher, 1989) rather than a unified entity.

Whilst Business lecturers are largely committed to the professional preparation of students, they adopt different teaching philosophies in achieving this aim. These varying beliefs were clear in the interviews I carried out with Business lecturers. From the interviews, it was evident, that although they are in general agreement in their aim of preparing students to enter commercial careers, their views differed as to how this was to be achieved. Some lecturers expressed their main aim in terms of transmitting a body of knowledge and skills:

> At the end of this course the students should learn basic Accounting. I expect all the students to be able to use their basic Accounting skills they learn ….and to understand business transactions (Mary, ACC 101).

Others argued that their main aim was to produce students capable of critical thinking, including a wider business context compromising political and ethical issues.

> I want them to have a critical and analytical mind. It is important because they need to go outside in the world and they need not to always be followers but be leaders too. So I ask for their opinions, be devils advocate (Kate , MGT 101).

For these lecturers, getting students to 'think critically' implied raising fundamental questions about the nature of business knowledge or its relationship with society, whereas the former lecturers interpret this phrase in terms of making students acquire business knowledge by making reference to the existing pool of knowledge.

2.8 Brief Summary

The main aim of this chapter has been to review the literature in terms of teaching conceptions within the disciplinary and cultural context. The literature has revealed that conceptions of teaching fall into a limited number of categories and are predominately distinguished as teacher-centred and student-centred. It also revealed that there are major differences between various disciplines and diverse cultures. Furthermore, it considered the epistemological and phenomenographic perspectives regarding conceptions and sought to address their importance in research findings. The next chapter concludes the literature review of the thesis. It evaluates the literature concerning the students' conceptions of learning their particular subjects.

CHAPTER 3

Literature Review

STUDENTS' CONCEPTIONS OF LEARNING

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the background framework based on previous research literature regarding student learning, and is basically an extension of Chapter 2. The chapter is divided into four distinct types of literature. The first draws on literature based on epistemological perspectives of learning. The second provides a phenomenographic account of learning, whilst the third reviews the nature of existing research supported by findings from a variety of relevant sources and contexts. An attempt is also made to highlight the relationship between conceptions of teaching and conceptions of learning, thus bringing together the findings from Chapter 2. Finally, the need for more research is outlined in the framework presented in the final part of this chapter.

Research on students' conceptions of learning has been embedded in various theoretical frameworks for decades. Perhaps the most obvious distinction made is between studies which have tried to examine academic performance and learning outcomes, and those which have attempted to describe the students' own experiences of learning. In moving from one focal point to the other, there is also an important shift in research perspectives which is of particular significance in understanding the present study (Marton, Hounsell and Entwistle, 1997). Two main perspectives of students' learning emerged from the literature: the meta-cognitive and the phenomenographic (Purdie, Hattie and Douglas 1996).

Meta-cognitive researchers explored students' epistemological conceptions about knowledge and learning (Ryan, 1984a; Schommer, 1990, 1994). Phenomenographic researchers, on the other hand, analysed the variety of meanings that learning has for people and the different ways in which they learn, using mainly qualitative methods (Marton, Dall'Alba and Beaty 1993). Both the epistemological and the phenomenographic perspectives of learning are analysed in the following sections.

3.2 The Epistemological Perspectives of Learning

Since the late 1980s, more and more educational researchers have become interested in studying students' epistemological development and epistemological beliefs.

Most of the traditional epistemological and methodological research frameworks regarded students' behaviour from the outside, as a separate and distinct experience (Marton, et al., 1997). The cognitive research tradition, for example, described a process through which people obtained learning concepts, by taking out the experiences in which the concepts were represented. Later, constructivist ideas were developed by merging various cognitive approaches with a focus on viewing knowledge as being constructed rather than being discovered. Entwistle (1998) argued that such research methods helped to explain how simple everyday concepts were constructed (for example,. 'table or dog' by children), but it was less clear how complex concepts were obtained. Thus, Entwistle concluded, there was a need to understand what is involved in student learning from the students' own descriptions of what learning means to them. According to Entwistle, understanding is a crucial concept in the literature of learning. This concept requires a change not just of methodology, but of the learning perspective. It follows, therefore, that theories of learning must be derived from

the settings to which they are applied, if they are to have any 'ecological validity' (Marton et al., 1997: 11); otherwise little confidence can be placed in the value of the theory.

The epistemological developments in learning have a role to play in outlining such theories, in which conceptions of learning are formulated, and are thus vital for the present study. Epistemology, although not unified in terminology, addresses students' thinking, conceptions and beliefs about knowledge. This is an important point since many researchers maintain that there is a relationship between epistemological beliefs about knowledge and conceptions of learning (Hofer and Pintrich, 1997).

The overall assumption made within the literature is that students display increasingly sophisticated levels of development as they go through college or university, and that their development from one level to another arises as the result of their learning abilities. In other words, 'individuals move through specified sequence in their ideas about knowledge and knowing, as their ability to make meaning evolves' (Hofer, 2001: 356).

Higher education therefore may influence the students' epistemological development (Alexander and Dochy, 1995; Perry, 1981; King and Kitchener, 1994; Schommer, 1998). Several studies have confirmed this. For example, American students (Alexander and Dochy, 1995) were found to develop multiple perspectives when defending their beliefs through their involvement in higher education. However, despite the fact that educational researchers have attempted to investigate how students' epistemological beliefs relate to learning in different content areas, we are still a long way from reaching some kind of consensus (Carey, Evans, Honda, Jay, and Unger, 1989; Driver, Leach, Millar, and Scott,

1996; Hammer, 1995; Larochelle and Desautels, 1991; Qian and Alvermann, 1995; Schommer, 1997; Solomon, Duveen, and Sott, 1994; Songer and Linn, 1991).

Research of undergraduate students' epistemological beliefs started with the work of William Perry and his associates on 'the Perry scheme' (1970, 1981) at Harvard University. Perry stated that students in the initial stages of their studies believe that knowledge is straightforward, simple and definite and passed down by someone in authority, usually the lecturer. In the later stages of their studies and through exposure to different ways of thinking most students come to believe that knowledge is complex, which may involve conflicting views and is obtained through reasoning. Perry argues that during their time in higher education, students gradually change from a belief in 'dualism' - where knowledge is concrete and provided by the lecturers - to recognition of 'relativism' - where students have to think and interpret meaning for themselves (Pillay and Boulton-Lewis, 2000; Pillay, Brownlee, and McCrindle, 1998).

However, Perry's work has proved problematic to some researchers. When researchers Glenberg and Epstein (1987) and Ryan (1984b), tried to link epistemological beliefs to student academic performance using Perry's scheme, results were sometimes contradictory. For example, Ryan (1984b Marton and Saljo (1997a,b) found a relationship between aspects of Perry's conception of epistemological beliefs and metacomprehension, but Glenberg and Epstein (1987) failed to find a similar relationship in their research investigating students' ability to rate their confidence in comprehension when reading a text. Glenberg and Epstein did not find any significant relationship between the students' dualistic score and their ability to accurately rate their confidence in comprehension.

In an effort to resolve these conflicting results, Schommer (1990) proposed an epistemological belief system consisting of four beliefs. Starting from the naive perspective, they are the following - knowledge is best characterised as: isolated facts (simple knowledge); knowledge is absolute (certain knowledge); the ability to learn is innate (innate ability), and learning is quick or not-at-all (quick learning). Schommer assessed each of these beliefs, through the use of a questionnaire. Three of the four beliefs have been found to predict academic performance among college students. The more students believe in quick learning, the more poorly they comprehend text and monitor their comprehension. The more students believe in certain knowledge, the more likely they are to interpret tentative information as absolute. In addition, 'the more students believe in simple knowledge, the more difficulty they encounter in understanding statistical text' (Schommer, 1993: 406).

Despite some contradictions associated with Perry's work, Perry's idea has been extended and redeveloped by others (Knefelkamp, 1999; Knefelkamp and Slepitza, 1978; Moore, 1989, 1991). Each of the developmental ideas which have been followed concentrated on a particular focus - that students progress from a dualistic view to a relativist or non-dualistic one. Schommer (1990) has re-conceptualised this relationship as an absolutist - relativist distinction and maintained that unsophisticated learners believe knowledge is discrete, unambiguous and certain (Purdie et al., 1996). More sophisticated learners believe knowledge to be flexible, as something that can be questioned or derived through reasoning (Hofer and Pintrich, 1997). In his theory of students' approaches to learning, Entwistle also makes a distinction between dualism and relativism (Entwistle et al., 2000).

Baxter Magolda (1993) has also described epistemological developments in a similar way to that described by Perry (1970) and Belenky et al. (1986). He described ways of knowing on a continuum of development which differed according to gender. His positions on this continuum were described as absolute (similar to Perry's dualism), transitional (similar to Perry's multiplelism), independent (similar to Perry's relativism) and contextual (similar to Perry's commitment positions).

Likewise, Lucas (2000) talked of two quite different 'student worlds' of learning a particular subject: a world of detachment where students see the subject as something to be 'passed, a technique to be learnt, lacking relevance and possessing negative attributes'; and a world of engagement where students see the subject as 'possessing inherent meaning and being personally relevant' (185).

A similar argument was put forward by Saljo (1979) who found a marked contrast between people who saw learning as involving the storing and reproducing of information and those who were more concerned in trying to grasp the meaning for themselves and so transforming the material presented. The reproduction of information is referred to as first-order conceptions, whereas the transformation of information is often termed as second-order conceptions (Van Rossum and Schenk, 1984). (See also Chapter 2). Marton and Booth (1997) labelled the second-order perspective as a 'visualisation metaphor' in which the learner develops a conceptual change and talks of seeing things in a new light.

In his review, Ramsden (1992) made a distinction between 'reproduction-oriented and meaning-oriented conceptions'. According to his view, a 'reproduction-oriented learning'

focuses on memorising by repeating information and facts', thus implying that information is not changed by the learner. A 'meaning-oriented' conception, however, is assumed to consist of constructive and meaningful activities, therefore allowing the learner to assimilate new information within his/her own conceptual framework and make a change in his/her understanding.

Svensson's research looked at the differences in how students organise knowledge and information: students either saw knowledge as 'discrete and segmented' or considered it as a 'whole'. The former is described as an atomistic approach, whilst the latter is described as a holistic one. 'The difference between a holistic and an atomistic approach was found to be the most crucial difference between interactions with complex learning materials' (1984: 64).

Roach, Blackmore, and Dempster, (2001) differentiated between two qualitatively different descriptions of learning: the 'adoptive' and the 'adaptive'. They noted that adaptive learning requires higher-level thinking, which is inherently creative, generative and reflective, requiring higher cognitive processes. Outcomes of adaptive learning would include formation and generation of arguments, reasoning and justification or synthesis and conceptualisation. Adoptive learning, on the other hand, is essentially a 'reproductive process and is appropriate after a situation has been defined' (Trigwell and Ashwin, 2006: 245)

Finally, Dweck and Leggett (1988) provided evidence to indicate that epistemological beliefs may also affect academic performance. They found that children who have a strong belief that the ability to learn is fixed, will exhibit helpless behaviour in the face of a difficult

exercise. Children, on the other hand, who have a strong belief that the ability to learn can be changed, see the same exercise as a challenge. In other words, they try different study strategies and persevere in their efforts.

To summarise therefore, there seems to be a strong relationship between epistemological beliefs about knowledge and conceptions of learning (Buelens, Clement and Clarebout, 2002). Despite the various descriptions given for the two sets of arguments, the overall assumption to be made is that if students conceive knowledge to be 'static', they will perceive learning as a process of accumulating information, whereas if students conceive knowledge to be 'flexible', they will see learning as meaningful and something to be discovered.

3.3 The Phenomenographic Perspectives of Learning

As the phenomenographic perspective has already been discussed in detail in the Methodology Chapter, here I will only focus on its relation to students' learning. Much of the research of conceptions of learning (as it was in the case of teaching in Chapter 2) specified that the epistemological perspective and the phenomenographic perspective are distinct but not incompatible, and that there seems to be a close relationship between conceptions of knowledge and conceptions of learning. The assumption to be made from the outlined literature is that there are dualistic and non-dualistic beliefs about knowledge (Hammer, 1994). Dualistic assumptions refer to a belief that knowledge is a fixed entity, separated from other pieces of information, including the learner. Non-dualistic assumptions, on the contrary, imply that knowledge is about integrating new knowledge with prior knowledge to construct meaningful understanding (Marton and Booth, 1997). It follows that from a non-

dualistic perspective, if the learner has come to experience a phenomenon in a more complex and meaningful way, a change is implied and learning has taken place.

Indeed much of the research of learning has incorporated non-dualistic qualitative methods, a good deal of it in the form of phenomenography. Marton and Saljo (1976a,b) described qualitatively different ways of conceptions of learning, whereas Perry (1988) identified qualitatively different conceptions of knowledge, and Marton and Booth talked about the 'act of learning' (1997: 85). Further, Marton and Booth (1997) and Ramsden (1992) maintained that learning entails a phenomenon being experienced in a complex way.

These researchers argued that 'learning does not exclusively represent a particular personality trait, nor is it the outcome of a conditioned biographical response but is a response to a student's perception, or way of experiencing his or her particular situation' (Lucas, 2000: 481). In the words of Ramsden, Masters, Stephanou, Walsh, Martin, Laurillard, and Marton (1993). 'There is only one world to which we have access to – and that is, the world-as-experienced' (303). Knowledge and learning, therefore, lie within these experiences.

Thus learning is seen as a process of 'construction of knowledge which takes place in a social context' (Lucas, 2000: 480), or situation. The underlying rationale for the phenomenographic perspective of learning is the notion that people act according to their interpretation of the situation rather than to an 'objective reality', which is emphasised in the positivist traditions (Watkins, 1996). When a non-dualistic perspective is adopted, the lived experience of the students is taken into consideration to establish how they understand a particular phenomenon, such as a Business course.

This section has introduced the phenomenographic perspective of learning, underlining its relevance to the present study. The focal points concerning this perspective are, on the one hand, a non-dualistic view of the relation between individuals and the world, and, on the other, an assumption that learning is the experience of different perspectives of a phenomenon.

This view of learning has formed a productive theoretical framework for research conducted on student learning over the last couple of decades. In the section which follows, a handful of these research findings that are relevant to the present study, are identified and discussed.

3.4 Review of Literature of Conceptions of Learning

An appropriate point to start would be to consider the students' own conceptions of learning. In other words, 'What do students think learning is?'

Indeed, the literature in answering this question contains a confusing collection of terms, often overlapping or running parallel to each other, and frequently describing the same phenomenon from a different theoretical perspective. The literature covers a wide spectrum of dimensions. From the research review, a handful of concepts stand out and show coherence in their relationships, enabling me to make sense of the literature. Here, I want to pull out several of these trends which I see as relevant to the present study.

The literature indicates that research has been carried out in several distinct areas. The findings focused first on what students believe learning involves (conceptions of learning);

secondly, on how they go about their learning (approaches to learning); thirdly, the context in which learning has taken place - that of culture (cross culture perspective) and, fourthly, the disciplines (disciplinary perspective) in which these studies were carried out. This research review is located in a body of literature which investigates all four elements.

3.4.1 Conceptions of learning

The majority of the research of students' conceptions of learning was initiated by Marton and Saljo in the early 1970s. One of the earliest findings was undertaken by Saljo (1979, who identified five different conceptions of learning held by students. Following these findings, Marton, Dall'Alba and Beaty (1993) developed six conceptions of learning. The first five conceptions are similar to those found by Saljo (1979). The six conceptions identified by Marton et al., (1993) are as follows: a) learning as increasing one's knowledge; b) learning as memorising and reproduction; c) learning as applying; d) learning as understanding; e) learning as seeing something in a different way; and f) learning as changing as a person.

Many studies which followed confirmed the same or similar findings. Van Rossum and Schenk (1984) for example, in their study of sixty-nine psychology students at a university in the Netherlands, classified students' conceptions in accordance with Saljo's five categories. Van Rossum and Taylor (1987) having interviewed ninety-one arts students in the Netherlands, also validated Saljo's five conceptions, but found a sixth conception that they characterised as: 'a conscious process, fuelled by personal interests and directed at obtaining harmony and happiness or changing society' (19). Morgan, Taylor and Gibbs (1980) also applied Saljo's framework in their study of twenty-nine students who were taking courses by distance learning with the Open University in the United Kingdom.

In most cases, the different ways of understanding were seen to form a hierarchy of categories of description which constituted the 'outcome space' (Marton, 1981). Marton explained that the categories could be compared with each other in order to establish, first, their suitability to a specified criterion, and, secondly, the understanding they represented. It is through these 'means that the variation of experience and learning within the student population may be captured' (Minasian-Batmanian, Lingad and Prosser, 2005: 281).

Sharma (1997) criticised earlier studies for not keeping up with research in general, especially in the field of Accounting. To address this lack, Sharma used phenomenography to find out what Accounting students mean by learning. The results were found to be alarming. Most of the students perceived learning as acquiring knowledge rather than as understanding and constructive analysis. The results also indicated that most students externalise learning rather than becoming personally (emotionally and physically) involved in it.

Many researchers hold the belief that students' conceptions of their academic activities will, to a large extent, determine the way they approach these activities (Trigwell and Ashwin, 2006). Indeed, a great deal of research of student learning has indicated that students' conceptions are partially related to their approaches to learning, which in turn influence their learning outcome. 'Approaches to Learning' is the section I will turn to next.

3.4.2 Approaches to Learning

An approach to learning is regarded as a key concept in teaching and learning, and is a qualitative description of what and how students learn (Ramsden, 1992). It 'describes a relation between the student and the learning he or she is doing' (44). However, approaches

to learning are not characteristics of students; rather, they 'represent what a learning task' or set of tasks is for the learner (Ramsden, 1987; Prosser and Trigwell, 1999). The importance of this concept lies in 'understanding the deficiencies in learning and recommending appropriate solutions for improving student learning' (Sharma, 1997: 127).

A number of researchers of students' approaches to learning has separated the initial approaches into two groups: namely 'surface' and 'deep' approaches (Marton and Saljo, 1976a,b; Saljo, 1979; Marton et. al., 1993). Students who employed surface approaches focused on memorisation and reproduction of information, and generally viewed learning as acquiring knowledge merely for passing examinations, with little or no focus on the processes. Learning for this type of students is externalised. Students using deep approaches, on the other hand, aimed for understanding, and were able to internalise learning, forming a wider picture of understanding how knowledge fits together and represents reality (Sharma, 1997). Interview-based research carried out in Britain and Sweden during the 1970s had identified a third approach known as the 'strategic' approach (Richardson, 2005).

Of the initial six conceptions by Marton et. al., (1993), the first three are normally associated with surface approaches to learning and the last three with deep approaches. The first three conceptions are seen as lacking in understanding and meaning, whilst the last three are seen as being concerned with understanding and meaning (Marton and Saljo, 1976a,b; Saljo, 1979). According to Marton et al., the first three focused on 'quantitative' dimensions of learning, whilst the latter three are typically 'qualitative', and relate to gaining meaning and understanding.

Other researchers using quantitative methods, asked students to think about how they carried out their studies in general, rather than focusing on students' approaches to tackling a particular task. This research approach was used by Entwistle and Ramsden (1983). By using the Approaches to Studying Inventory (ASI), Entwistle and Ramsden formulated four main 'study orientations': the meaning and reproducing orientations, which correspond to deep and surface approaches to learning; the strategic orientation that entails the students' intention of maximising grades, and finally the non-academic orientation which is a 'dysfunctional' response to the requirements of higher education. Working from a different theoretical perspective, Biggs (1978) developed similar results with his Study Process Questionnaire (SPQ), in which three dimensions of the study were identified: namely, 'utilising' (similar to surface approach); 'internalising' (deep) and 'achieving' (strategic) dimensions. Biggs has provided a useful description of approaches to learning as 'congruent motive-strategy packages' in that they comprise both intention and a related strategy (1986: 133). His results confirmed the usefulness of 'deep' and 'surface' approaches.

Most recently, some studies have questioned aspects of the deep/surface dichotomy. Research into Accounting students carried out by Hall et al. (2004), found that lower-level strategies, such as rote learning and paraphrasing, can be used simultaneously with a deep approach. In Accounting, for instance 'students first must learn the terminology, basic concepts and procedures before being able to apply knowledge to novel problems and reflect….the appropriateness of various treatments and methods' (Cooper, 2004: 289). Cooper found that, whilst surface approaches to learning can be associated with rote learning, the Chinese tradition of memorisation through repetition (as we shall see in the next section) can be used to deepen understanding and achieve high levels of academic performance.

Recently, Haggis (2003) proposed a 'critical investigation' into the area of 'approaches to learning' research in higher education. Haggis argues that the popularity of this theory amongst researchers and lecturers has led to the situation 'where these ideas are seen to encapsulate the truth about student learning and …. the assumption that desirable approaches can be elicited by the use of particular teaching methods' (Haggis 2003 cited in Marshall and Case, 2005: 257). She also criticises the overall assumption that deep approaches should be promoted in higher education, and advocates that this may reflect the elite goals and values of the academics themselves but have little relevance to the majority of students in a mass higher education context. Even though, however, some studies have questioned aspects of the deep/surface distinction, there has been a general agreement about their usefulness in students' learning (Richardson, 1994).

It is not difficult to conclude at this stage that the research into students' conceptions of learning over the last two and half decades has included a large body of studies initiated by the work of Marton and Saljo (1976a, b). It is also easy to see that this framework has had a powerful influence on conceptions of student learning in higher education (Entwistle 1997). Many of these studies are based on quantitative methods, using inventories. Others have adopted the phenomenographic approach.

Such research has increased the attention given to how learning is experienced, understood, or conceptualised by learners themselves. This study extends the investigation to include Cypriot students' conceptions of learning.

3.4.3 Cross-cultural Perspectives

Many researchers argue that conceptions of learning are context dependent (Gao and Watkins, 2002; Marton, 1981; Marton and Booth, 1997). This assumes that, whilst some parts of learning conceptions may be similar across contexts, others may vary in terms of discipline, social and cultural background.

Although many studies over the years have acknowledged remarkable similar conceptions of learning (Pillay and Boulton-Lewis, 2000), many researchers, however, maintained that conceptions of learning should be examined in terms of their social and cultural contexts (Marton and Booth, 1997). Saljo, for example, stated that 'to learn is to act within man-made institutions and to adapt to the particular definitions of learning that are valid in the educational environment in which one finds oneself' (Saljo, 1979: 106). Furthermore, he stated that different environments will define learning according to 'different socially and culturally established conventions with respect to what counts as learning' (Saljo 1979: 104). These statements indicate a need for further research. There is now a significant number of studies which have been carried out with students in a specific educational context in different countries. However, such studies in Cyprus are very limited and have been predominantly quantitative in nature. There is a clear need to widen the research to include the experience of students from different countries and educational background. This study attempts to address this gap.

In the absence of any significant research involving students' learning from Eastern Mediterranean countries such as Cyprus, there is the large body of work from cross-cultural studies of Asian students (Dahlin and Regmi 1997; Dahlin and Watkins, 2000; Kember,

2000; Marton, Dall'Alba and Tse, 1996; Meyer, 2000). Their findings, when compared with results in Western countries, are most surprising and are relevant to the present study.

Considerable developments towards the understanding of learning conceptions come from comparisons between Western and Asian cultures. Such comparisons are particularly compelling because of clearly noticeable, long-standing philosophical and educational traditions (Nisbett, 2003). Similarly, cross-cultural studies have examined the differences between Western and Asian cultures and made comparisons within and between Western countries (Alexander and Douchy, 1995; Chan and Elliott, 2002; Mason and Castiglioni, 2000; Qian and Pan, 2002; Karabenick and Moosa 2005). Research of culture and learning has implications for many social and educational processes (Feather, 1993; Nisbett, 2003).

By contrast, there is little systematic evidence regarding the applicability of Western conceptualisation learning theories to Eastern Mediterranean countries. Studies of the epistemological beliefs and conceptions of learning of Cypriot students are noticeably absent from the extensive literature of conceptions of learning.

The vast majority of such studies have been conducted in the West (Australia and European countries) even though there is now a steady increase of this type of research in Asian countries. Much of it has been conducted in China, Hong Kong and Japan by Biggs (1987, 1991, 1992, 1996a, 1996b), Marton, et al. (1996), Marton, Watkins and Tang (1997), Dahlin and Watkins (2000), and Fung, Carr and Chan (2001). The conclusion made in all these studies is that Asian students view learning within their own culture and philosophies of learning (Fung et al., 2001). Asian students, as compared with their Western counterparts,

make extensive use of memorisation when learning (suggesting the presence of a surface approach), whilst, at the same time, displaying extremely high-quality learning outcomes (theoretically linked to a 'deep' approach). Some researchers have gone as far as to suggest that the approach which involves both understanding and memorisation should be re-developed as a new approach, distinct from the classic 'deep and surface' divisions (Kember, 1996). This constitutes an interesting implication for the present study.

The growing body of literature concerning learning in China and Hong Kong (Kember, Kwan and Ledesma, 2001; Kember and Wong, 2000; Kwan and Ng, 1999), has shown that Chinese students have high achievement levels especially in Mathematics and Science compared to Western students (Biggs,1996b; Chen, Lee, and Stevenson, 1996). Questions have been raised as to how Chinese students, often perceived by Western educators as passive learners, could perform so well in these international achievement tests. Biggs (1996b) claims that socio-cultural factors and socio-economic structures may explain the performance differences.

Purdie, et al., (1996) investigated the differences between Australian and Japanese secondary school students' conceptions of learning and found that they were similar to those identified by Marton, et al., (1993). Australian students were found to concentrate mainly on school knowledge, whereas the Japanese students viewed learning as a process leading to personal fulfilment. In another study, Dahlin and Regmi (1997) conducted a phenomenographic study into conceptions of learning among thirty Nepalese university students. The study concluded that Nepalese students regard memorising and understanding as interlinked in a way not usually found amongst Western students. The conceptions described above are not identical

with those found in the West. However, they are not completely different either, and some common features were identified: 'Rote learning without understanding, but in order to pass exams' is one such feature (491).

To summarise therefore, although the degree of research into students' conceptions of learning utilising the phenomenographic approach has increased in recent years, there is a complete lack of literature in relation to the specific nature of Cypriot students' learning experiences and in particular their conceptions of learning. Aspects of conceptions and their relationships with culture and nationality have only just begun to be explored in countries other than Western ones. This study was informed of these gaps in the literature and makes an attempt to address them.

3.4.4 Disciplinary Perspectives

Perhaps less established within academic culture, is the idea that 'teaching' means more than teaching and performing, and extends more broadly to providing a context in which students engage productively with their subject matter. There is now a general feeling in the academic environment, that it should focus more on what the student does and thinks in their particular subject (Shuell, 1986).

There is a need to redevelop the idea of learning within different disciplinary contexts (Entwistle, 1997). It is noted by some researchers that conceptions of learning will have different meaning in different academic disciplines (Ramsden, 1988). As stated by Entwistle 'this is an area of research which is, so far, undeveloped and needs attention' (1997: 216).

More specifically, Meyer and Eley (1999) argued that individual students might well adopt different patterns of learning behaviour depending on the different subjects they are learning. The experiences of learning a subject, therefore, 'vary considerably from one discipline to another' (198).

Furthermore, in their study of computer simulation, Windschitl and Andre (1998) found that students who had more advanced epistemological beliefs, learned more through a constructivist treatment (an exploratory computer simulation), and those with less advanced beliefs learned more with an objectivist treatment (a confirmatory simulation). According to Hofer (2001), this stresses the importance of making the epistemological assumptions and knowledge-building processes of the disciplines more specific. Further, Hofer maintains that developing an understanding of how knowledge is developed within the disciplines, is a fundamental part of the teaching of thinking skills; in that, 'it is useful to discuss not only 'what we know' but 'how we know what we know' (Hofer 2001: 377). Hofer's latter argument is more specifically linked to the present section.

Within the higher education environment, student learning is still often seen in the contexts of particular disciplines. For example, the discipline of Business Studies stands as a distinctive programme in higher education institutes and is very popular in colleges and universities in Cyprus. It involves a combination of subjects relevant to business, such as Economics, Marketing, Accounting and Management (the subjects also chosen for this study). Appropriate to this context of student learning is a significant body of literature which examines academic disciplines as distinctive epistemological and social communities (Geertz, 1983; Becher, 1989; Becher and Trowler, 2001; Henkel, 2000; Maassen, 1996).

However, these studies have concentrated almost totally upon the lecturers for whom academic disciplines are considered to be 'ways of life' (Maassen, 1996; Kogan, 2000). Kember's (1996, 2000) extensive work on student learning, on the other hand, has been criticised for being generic and applying to all learning contexts irrespective of either level or discipline. This criticism is supported by research of students' approaches to learning which indicates that their characteristic features may differ from one disciplinary context to another (Mayer, Parsons and Dunne 1990).

For the lecturers, academic identities are closely linked to professional identities. For students, starting on a process of academic and professional development, the existence of distinctive disciplinary cultures is an important part of their experience (Becher and Trowler, 2001)

In their latest research, Trigwell and Ashwin (2006) argue that students may also adopt or use different conceptions according to perceived difference in the context. So it is not so much the conceptions of learning per se, but 'those conceptions that are evoked by the students' experience of their unique learning situation' (Trigwell and Ashwin, 2006: 244). Both talked of 'situated conceptions' that are seen to be an integral part of the process of learning. A situated conception of learning is one that students adopt in response to their perceived learning context.

Very little research exists in the area of Business Studies which involves a variety of disciplines such as Economics, Accounting, Marketing and Management, as is the case of this study. Of the research that exists in this area, the vast majority of it is almost and

exclusively concentrated in the area of Accounting **(**Gunstone and White, 1988). In one study into student conceptions of Accounting, Lucas (2000) reported that 'for most students, learning Accounting is about learning a technique' - in that students' main concern is to pass their examinations and to get good grades. They see Accounting - as being all about numbers. She also reported 'that some students were able to engage with Accounting and relate it to their own personal relevancies' (499). For them, the course is one in which they can develop their understanding of Accounting and of the world.

In a much more recent study, Luca's view was reinforced when Beverley and Robertson (2006), advocated that 'students who approach their learning in accountancy, with the intention of understanding the material will find value in both didactic and interactive teaching approaches', as long as these complemented each other. However, students who approach their learning in a surface way are 'unlikely to be aware of the conceptual frameworks and the modelling of critical thinking offered by lecturers'. 'Nor are they likely to appreciate discussion-based tutorials, preferring instead to be 'taught' by the tutors' (56).

It is not only the epistemology of a discipline that may affect students' learning; the interest and motivation of students in studying a particular discipline may also play a part. There is now a wide selection of interdisciplinary degree courses. For example, many disciplines are studied only at an introductory level and do not form the main area of study; consequently 'a number of students may not even see their relevance' (Lucas and Meyer, 2004: 460).

For instance, research studies in Accounting (Mladenovic, 2000) indicate that some introductory level Accounting students may come to the subject with negative preconceptions. The power of such stereotypical views, Fisher and Murphy (1995) argue,

should not be underestimated. Lucas and Meyer (2004) also stated that negative preconceptions of, and attitudes towards, the subject of Accounting may well be associated with strong 'emotions about the learning of the subject' (461). For example, one particular attitude reported by non-accounting students was that learning Accounting was something to be feared (Lucas, 2000). This implies that it may well be that other motivations exist for students and, if they are not related to an inherent interest in the subject, they may be linked with some of the more negative preconceptions of the subject itself. Phenomenographic work on student intentions within their subject matter has identified relevance to be of central importance (Lucas, 2000). At Cyprus College, all students intending to study for a major degree in Business have to take the common core subjects. These are compulsory and may not form the main area of study. Such subjects include the four disciplines investigated by this study.

It can be argued, therefore, that a more useful way of investigating conceptions held by students in specific disciplines is required. As far as it can be established, there are very few examples of studies which have sought to uncover the forms of conceptions, in particular undergraduate disciplines, and more specifically in Business Studies.

3.5 Relationships between Lecturers' Conceptions of Teaching and Students' Conceptions of Learning

The aim of the present study is to contribute to the relatively small literature dealing with conceptions of teaching and how this relates to the conceptions of students' learning. Whilst it might be expected that the lecturer's conceptions of teaching would be closely related to

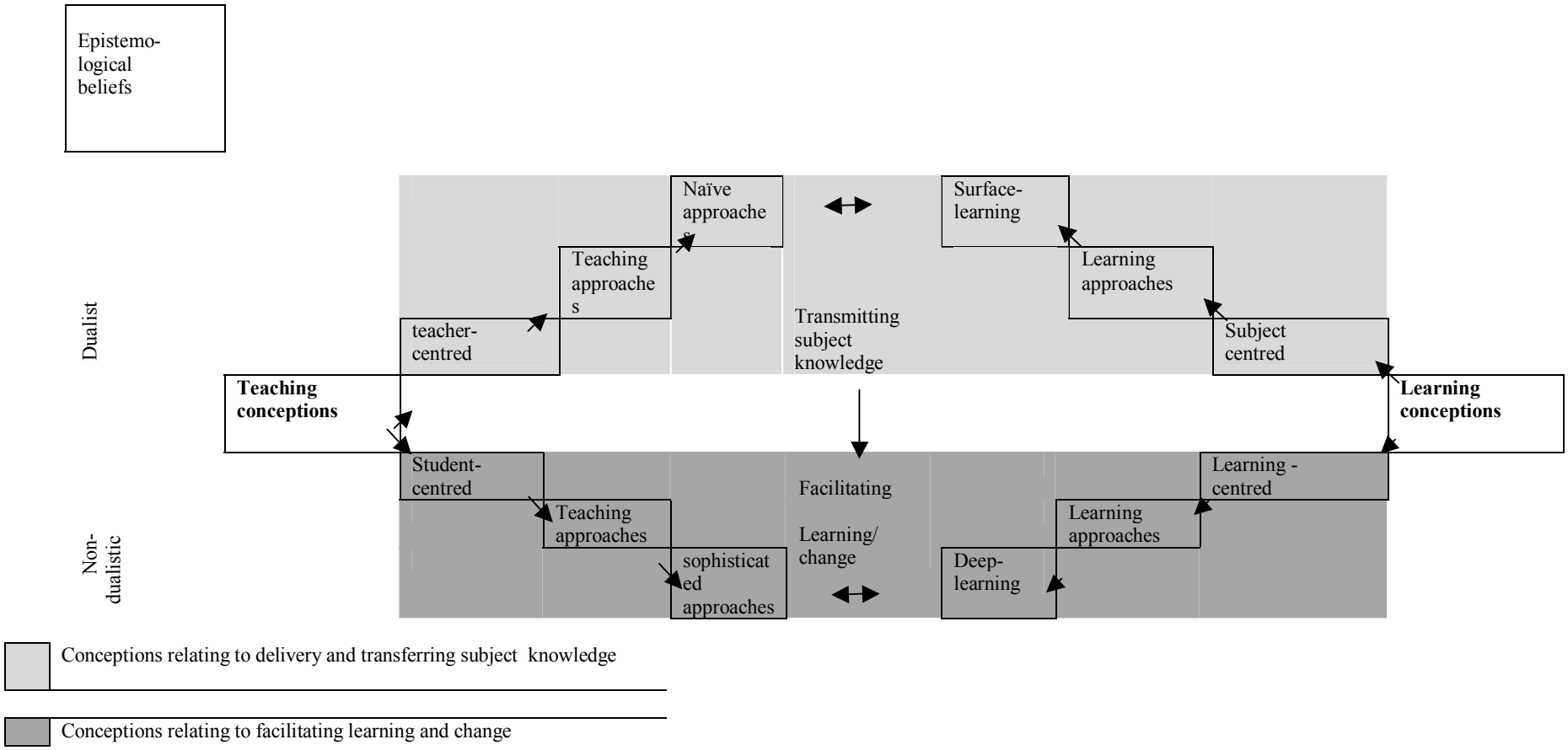
the students' conceptions of learning - and there is some evidence in the literature to support this claim - the proposition requires further investigation.

Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that within the present literature, there are several relationships between conceptions of teaching and learning. In his 1997 study, Kember concluded that a relationship exists between teaching conceptions, approaches to teaching, student approaches to learning, and student learning outcomes. In earlier research, Gow and Kember (1993) identified a link between lecturers' conceptions of teaching, and measures for changes in students' approaches to learning. The results specified that 'orientations (or conceptions) to teaching' were significant in how students changed their approaches to learning (Kember and Gow, 1994). Similarly, Trigwell et al. (1994) and Trigwell and Prosser (1996a,b) found a relationship between lecturers' intentions and their teaching strategies, whilst Gow and Kember (1993) found relationships between lecturers' conceptions of teaching and changes in students approaches to learning. Sheppard and Gilbert (1991) conducted case studies of teaching and learning in four different departments. They concluded that the development of students' beliefs about the structure of knowledge in their discipline was influenced by the lecturers' theories of teaching and the students' perceptions of the learning environment. The students' beliefs about knowledge, on the other hand, were found to have an impact on the learning approaches they adopted. It was also found that meaningful learning outcomes were more likely to be associated with courses in the departments which explicitly considered alternative conceptions of knowledge (Kember and Kwan, 2000). Other studies have produced similar results. Trigwell, Prosser and Lyons (1997) found that university Science students, who adopted deeper approaches to learning, were more likely to be taught by staff who themselves implemented teaching approaches

which were focused towards students' understanding. In contrast, in situations where lecturers described their teaching as dominated by the transmission of knowledge, students were more likely to adopt a surface approach to learning. Further findings have also identified that students with a surface approach, in a class which is designed to facilitate a deep approach, will see the situation quite differently from a student who has adopted a deep approach to learning (Prosser and Trigwell, 1997). Patrick (1998) found a close match between the learning approach students adopted and the way in which their teacher had communicated the subject to them. The results suggested that students who adopted deeper approaches to learning were taught by lecturers who aimed at changing students' conceptions and that students who adopted more surface approaches to learning were taught by lecturers who focused more on delivering knowledge (Trigwell, Prosser and Waterhouse, 1999).

Given the well-established link between conceptions of teaching and student approaches to learning, it seems reasonable to look for parallel constructs for conceptions of teaching and conceptions of learning. Can conceptions of teaching be related to students' actual conceptions of learning? A further significant question then arises as to whether these may have an impact upon the approaches students adopt towards their studies and the resulting quality of their learning. The following Table 3.1 conceptualises visually the links between the various literatures and outlines the main themes in the literature under the headings: epistemological beliefs; subject/student-centred and teaching/learning–centred concepts. It emphasises at the same time, the approaches to teaching and learning, and distinguishes between transmitting and facilitating knowledge conceptions.

Table 3.1. **The conceptual framework of the literature regarding conceptions of teaching and learning**
(Findings from the literature)



3.6 Setting up the Conceptual Framework for the Present Study

The main focus of the study was to examine how students studying Business courses perceive learning and how lecturers in the same discipline perceive their teaching.

The common strand which draws together the literature reviews in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 is outlined in Table 3.1, which briefly summarises the findings. Five main issues are raised for further research in the local context.

The first issue, as already mentioned in the Introduction, concerns the lack of attention given to non-qualitative research methods using interpretive approaches such as phenomenography, particularly within higher education in Cyprus. Most of the studies have concentrated on examining the academic assessment and achievement of students using the more traditional methods of investigation. This type of research will introduce the field of phenomenography to the very young academic and research establishments in Cyprus.

The second issue is the complete lack of any known research regarding both Cypriot students' conceptions of learning and their lecturers' conceptions of teaching in higher education. Most of the studies of this topic have been concentrated in the West with some from Asian countries, mainly Hong Kong and China. However, there is very little evidence of this type of research in Cyprus.

Thirdly, many studies have focused on conceptions of both learning and teaching, and examined the relations between them. However, despite significant advancements made in both areas, there is still a relatively limited amount of research addressing the link between

lecturers' conceptions of teaching and students' conceptions of learning in specific subjects. More research is needed to frame the patterns of this relationship. The evidence suggests that there is a connection between the transmitting of knowledge categories and facilitating learning for understanding categories. This research study aims to explore further this assumption. (See Table 3.1).

Fourthly, although a considerable amount of research has been carried out in various disciplines, Science in particular, very few if any have included Business disciplines in general and specifically in the areas of Economics, Accounting, Management and Marketing. The study aims to tackle this specific issue.

Finally, Kane, Sandretto and Heath, (2002) raised concerns about the work of several researchers, widely mentioned in this review, such as Prosser, Trigwell, Taylor and Dall'Alba. These researchers 'have failed to make explicit the epistemological and theoretical assumptions that have guided the focus of inquiry' (Kane et. al., 2002: 196). Awareness in research is important in ensuring 'how one's own biases and preconceptions may be influencing what one is trying to understand' (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994: 123). It is with this in mind that an effort has been made to demonstrate reflexivity throughout the thesis.

3.7 Brief Summary

The main aim of this chapter has been to review the literature from the phenomenological and epistemological perspectives. It also discussed the literature in terms of conceptions of learning and approaches to learning within the disciplinary and cultural context. Whilst the

volume of research into students' conceptions of learning using the phenomenographic approach has increased in recent years, there is a surprising lack of literature in relation to the specific nature of Cypriot students' conceptions of learning within their own cultural, educational and disciplinary context. This study took into consideration these gaps and outlined the main trends which have evolved within the literature.

A conceptual framework which brings together the literature reviews from Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 has been identified and discussed. After examining the relevant literature constructed mainly in Western countries, the need for more research has been outlined in five main areas. An effort has been made for these issues to be addressed within this study.

In the next chapter, the methodological framework adopted in this research is discussed and analysed

CHAPTER 4

Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The chapter concerning methodology introduces and explains the research methods and processes used and explored within this study. The discussion is focused mainly on the qualitative, and most specifically, the constructivist - interpretive approach used to elicit information about lecturers' teaching and students' learning in the higher education arena.

A framework similar to Crotty's (1998) classification is used to identify the study's methodology process and structure. This involved the appropriate choice of epistemology/ontology, leading to a suitable theoretical perspective, then to the methodology and data sources, and finally to the analytical methods and techniques. This process was thought necessary to answer the research questions of the study.

The choice of epistemology/ontology and the philosophical stance informed the interpretive inquiry perspective employed in this study. The constructivist-interpretive inquiry lies behind the methodology used, in this case the phenomenographic approach, which in turn governed the choice and use of the research instrument, that of interviews. Questions regarding the trustworthiness of the research and ethical considerations are also discussed.

4.2. The Philosophical Stance

I was initially confronted with the dilemma of choosing a methodological framework when I was developing my research proposal. In my search for straightforward and clear answers, I tried to draw on the 'Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methods' module offered by the University of Nottingham in the summer of 2002. Here I was exposed to a range of ontological and epistemological prepositions which underpin various research traditions. However, rather than having my questions answered, the module raised more questions for me to tackle. This chapter provides a response to my initial questions regarding the methodology of the research study.

The overall aim of this study is to examine the lecturers' and students' conceptions of teaching and learning in the introductory Business courses of a private college in Cyprus. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to explore the research methods considered most suitable. Choosing either the qualitative or the quantitative strategy in one's research is only one part of the methodology. Equally important is the philosophical stance and the epistemological and ontological perspectives (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) adopted in the research study. In fact, questioning the guiding principles or research paradigms is not considered as an optional addition to one's investigation, but a requirement. As emphasised by Guba and Lincoln (1994: 105), 'questions of method are secondary to questions of paradigms'. These very important issues have to be sorted out and digested before the research even commences. Through intense reading, I came to understand research paradigms as offering loose frameworks which steer our research but, more importantly, provide us with 'sensitising' lenses with which to review reflexively 'what we do', 'how' and 'why we do it' (Raven, 2006).

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994: 99) a paradigm is defined as a 'basic set of beliefs that guide actions'. In this way a paradigm influences what should be studied, how it should be carried out and how results should be exposed. Both scholars further pointed out that a paradigm encompasses three guiding principles, which affect the choice and implementation of the research: ontology (or the theory of being), epistemology (or the theory of knowing) and methodology (how we gain knowledge). Bogdan and Biklen (1998) regarded these perspectives to be guiding orientations of which researchers are aware, and use as they collect and analyse data. As pointed out in this chapter, methodology concentrates on how we obtain knowledge about the world, whereas ontological issues raise questions about the nature of reality and whether reality is objective or the result of cognition. Epistemology, defined and discussed in previous Chapters 2 and 3, concerns the nature of the knowledge generated in one's research and it deals with the question of what is or should be regarded as acceptable knowledge. Furthermore, it raises questions as to whether knowledge can be acquired or must be experienced. In other words, epistemology provides the philosophical groundwork – the framework if you like – which justifies knowledge and the structure for a process that will produce, through a 'rigorous' methodology, answers that can be believed to be valid and reliable.

It is inevitable, however, that not only is epistemology addressed in one's research but also ontology. This means that the research should not only improve what we know about college and university teaching and learning, but it should also do so as a means of challenging and transforming ways of being lecturers (Dall'Alba, 2005). So, 'epistemology is not seen as an end in itself, but is in the service of ontology' (362).

Therefore, ontology not only stresses what we know and can do, but it also emphasises who we are (Dall'Alba 2005). Such an emphasis Dall'Alba argues is at odds with a predominant focus on epistemology (in the form of knowledge and skills) within the courses currently offered at higher education institutes. Heidegger (1998) argued that this lack of attention to ontology has meant that we increasingly 'technologise' education resulting in the already increasing bureaucratisation of universities. This, Heidegger adds, has contributed to the existing trend for readily measurable outcomes which is reflected in all areas of education, such as courses, reduction of teaching loads, research and scholarship. The latter is particularly evident in the area of research in my own work, where quantifiable evidence in all areas of research undertaken by the faculty is required. Dall'Alba goes on to say that this tendency diminishes what we know and can do, and at the same time, it overlooks who we are as academics and lecturers. Whereas the so called 'technologised' state of higher education can be seen as an ontological problem, a more important issue for this particular argument is that of a focus on epistemology at the expense of ontology (Dall'Alba 2005) falls short of what research in higher education is expected to accomplish.

In practical terms, this means directing attention to ontology by focusing on what it means to be a lecturer or student and consequently what it means to teach and learn. In other words, we need to explore ways in which knowledge, Business knowledge in particular, is understood and experienced by the participants themselves. This idea falls in line with Dall'Alba's (2004) and Dall'Alba's and Barnacle's (2004) argument that knowing is not exclusively cognitive, but is created, enacted and embodied. This means that knowing is not something we possess, but rather who we are. 'Our very being in the world [therefore]

is shaped by the knowledge we pursue, uncover, and embody' (Thomson, 2001: 250). This perspective forms my own understanding of the ontological issues guiding this research.

The two prevailing research-guiding principles, discussed later within this chapter, traditionally used in Social Science research, stemmed from the so-called positivist and constructivist epistemology. Although this remains true, the debate has moved on. For example post-modernism has pursued the constructionist argument to its 'logical' conclusion, that in a sense nothing exists beyond discourse. However, the debate about these paradigms may have gained a new source of input from the contemporary influence of critical realism on social theory (Bhaskar, 1993). Critical realism tries to find a new way through the two-paradigm dichotomy.

4.2.1 The Critical – Realism position

The critical-realism position is generally accepted in modern research methodology and is the basis for studying unobservable phenomena such as intelligence, self-concept and causality. Critical realism primarily entails that, first, whereas positivists take the view that the scientist's conceptualisation of reality actually directly reflects that reality, realists argue that the scientist's conceptualisation is simply a way of knowing that reality. Secondly, whereas hypothetical entities, which account for regularities in the natural or social world, are perfectly acceptable for realists, they are not for positivists. What makes critical realism, therefore, *critical* is that the identification of generative mechanisms offers the prospect of introducing changes that can transform the 'status quo' (Nash, 2005). The application of this philosophy to the Social Sciences, including education, has been carried out by several authors, (for example, Bhaskar, 1979; Walters and Young, 2001**).**

As a philosophical movement, critical realism 'asserts that the entities of the world possess causal powers by virtue of their existence and that the explanation of events, states, and processes should be made with reference to the properties that confer such powers' (Nash 2005: 187). Johnson and Duberley (2000) argued that critical realism is a position, which takes into consideration objective ontology and subjective epistemology. Objective ontology refers to the nature of things, independent of what others or we may think about them; in other words, the world is 'real', and exists independently of the 'idea that we have of it'. Subjective epistemology, on the other hand, implies that what is known is subjective. In other words what we think, believe and experience is subjective. Thus, whilst I will go along with the subjective epistemology, I also believe the world is made up of 'the idea that '*we have'* of it - that of which we '*experience*', as proposed by the phenomenographic methodology, discussed in Section 4.4. Critical realists might argue, however, that we do not just 'experience' something – there has to be a real object for us to be able to experience it. This argument is explained further in Section 4.4. As a philosophical position therefore, critical-realism might be seen by some as lacking in its epistemological position.

In fact, many researchers maintained that critical-realism as a research methodology has failed to provide epistemologically influential rules for guiding researchers. Walters and Young, (2001), for example, have argued that critical realism is extremely weak in the epistemological domain. The key issue for methodology, therefore, is whether there is a critical realist epistemology that reasonably supports its ontological claims. In short, are there rigorous rules able of guiding researchers in their attempts to discover the deep

structures of reality? According to Walters and Young (2001), the rules it offers are either 'innocuous or insulated' explanations from empirical challenges. Moreover, in the absence of a supporting epistemology, 'critical-realism is rather more positivists about what we cannot observe than many supposed positivists are about what we can' (2001: 500). Taking this view into consideration together with my own personal beliefs, I came to the conclusion that the critical-realism approach, perhaps, may not be suitable for this particular study.

4.2.2 The Constructivist Position

The important aspects of constructivism and interpretive inquiry, which are central to this research, are discussed in this and the next section. Even though the debate about the two well-established, prevailing, research guiding principles - the positivist and constructivist - has been expanded from the influence of critical-realism on social theory, the differences between the two domains continue to influence research practices and it is worth outlining those differences within the context of the present study.

In a positivist epistemology, which has been the main research paradigm in Social Science for the past century, it is assumed that researchers should use scientific methods to produce objective, empirically verifiable knowledge. In other words, positivism is ontologically based on the assumption that reality and universal 'truths' are observable (Summer and Tribe, 2004). Research inquiry is the search for these 'truths'. These 'truths' can be observed in an objective and independent manner by the researcher, but without being influenced by the researcher's own values and assumptions. For the positivist, knowledge consists of established hypotheses which can be received as 'facts or laws' (Guba and

Lincoln, 1994), for which quantitative methods of research are the principal methods of investigation. This particularly appeals to the natural Science element. A particular important issue in this thesis is the question of whether the social world, and in particular that of education, should be studied according to the same principles and procedures as the natural Sciences. My own opinion is that it cannot do so for reasons discussed later in the chapter.

In contrast, in a constructivist epistemology 'the emphasis is placed on the processes and meanings that are not rigorous, examined or measured (if measured at all), in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency' (Guba and Lincoln, 1994: 4). The constructivist philosophy is idealist, in that it assumes 'that what is real is a construction in the minds of individuals' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985: 83). Rather than assuming that a reality or truth exists and can be understood, constructivism assumes that knowledge or reality is constructed by the researcher and is likely to change. In other words, constructivists search for many 'truths'. Furthermore, the concept of a single 'truth' for the constructivist is meaningless to accurately describe the world (Molteberg and Bergstrom, 2002).

My aim in this study is to gain an understanding of what is 'conceptualised' by those who experience learning and teaching. This entails many different conceptions and experiences, thus many different viewpoints. This means that information should be gathered (by the involvement of the researcher) from the participants' knowledge, and should be obtained through their unique understanding of their daily experiences in the classroom. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) and Guba and Lincoln (1998) distinguished constructivism from positivism, post-positivism and critical theory, whereas others have labelled it as 'naturalistic' or

'interpretive' (Guba and Lincoln, 1994) and 'hermeneutical' (Schwandt, 1994) epistemology. Additionally, Denzin and Lincoln (1998) suggested four interpretive paradigms which guide qualitative research: positivist, post-positivist, constructivist-interpretive, and critical and feminist-post-structural. My own study, based on my ontological perspective of the world, is developed around Denzin and Lincoln's (1998) constructivist-interpretive orientation to research.

There are different types of constructivist orientation, amongst them radical and social constructivism. Radical constructivist suggest that knowledge is a product of a person's individual conceptual understanding which becomes necessary when individuals try to make sense of their own experiences (Confrey, 1994). The social constructivists, on the other hand, do not focus on the individual, but on the social elements, that are essential to the construction of knowledge (Richardson, 1997). From a social constructivist perspective, the way an individual interprets and makes sense of the world is dependent upon the experience contained in the process of understanding these experiences. This means that no two people have identical methods of acquiring knowledge regarding teaching and learning, but they might have similar versions of this knowledge. Commencing my research as a novice researcher, I see that the social constructivism view is very much linked with the phenomenographic approach, discussed later in the chapter.

Adopting a constructivist epistemology will allow me to focus my efforts on developing constructions which are meaningful in higher education in general and in Business courses in particular. This, I believe, will allow me to generate research that can be both useful and beneficial in the local context of education. At this point, it is reasonable to state that using

the constructivist concept as the main idea of the research approach does not exclude the usefulness and even the necessity of other constructivist approaches.

To conclude, therefore, constructivism is positioned ontologically on the premise that reality, the world, as the subject of research does not exist independently from our experiences. Instead, multiple realities exist which are intangible, local and specific, and require the 'inclusive constructions of the world through the interaction of the researcher and the researched' (Molteberg and Bergstrom, 2002: 21).

The constructivist orientation I have discussed here, together with the interpretive inquiry, discussed in the next section, allowed me to embark on the research journey with a view to understanding how lecturers and students view their Business courses provided by a higher institute in the island of Cyprus. By gaining an understanding of this view, I have also gained an understanding of the different approaches which could serve the needs of the Cypriot lecturers as they prepare to teach these courses. Therefore, through this study I have provided a description and an understanding of my research undertaking, including the findings resulting from such interpretive inquiry.

4.3 The Interpretive Inquiry

In adopting a constructivist epistemology, it follows that the interpretive inquiry approach is most appropriate in recognising that experiencing the world and constructing knowledge through these experiences, leads to understandings that may be subject to continuous evaluation and changes. Interpretive inquiry is based on the notion that there is *no* pre-existent reality out there. In other words, there is no single correct meaning or knowledge

waiting to be explored; rather, it lends itself to the exploration of questions that are of a more deeply personal nature (Smith, 1992).

In other words, interpretive inquiry focuses on understanding the meanings of events from the participants themselves. Thus, interpretive inquiry is not concerned with confirming or not confirming existing theoretical positions; rather it questions commonly accepted ways of thinking about learning and teaching, and how this is reflected in our classes (Smith, 1992). The essence, therefore, in using interpretive research is in creating meaning and understanding and not just reporting on it (Smith. 1991). Thus, interpretive enquiry is not usually looking into developing theory (Seidman, 1998), but it explores an understanding of people and their situations in a more personal way. This implies that the data cannot be collected in the absence of the participants and without the involvement of the researcher.

This entails that the interpretive researcher is required to acknowledge his/her own predispositions, biases, and pre-assumptions which may need to be taken into account when reporting the findings. Undoubtedly, my experiences as a lecturer of Business courses has influenced my beliefs and understanding about the Business disciplines to which students are exposed every day. These beliefs contribute to the propositions and understanding with which I commence the research. Thus, by using the interpretive method of inquiry, I am reminded that I should remain always open and reflective to the possibility of uncovering ideas and insights that I may have not previously considered.

One important fact embedded in the study, is that students' conceptions and experiences have to be taken into account if lecturers are to help them to successfully accomplish their college learning outcomes. At the same time, it also recognises the fact that if teacher education and training is to be improved and developed, the lecturers' experiences of teaching those students need to be also taken into account.

Thus, the research was undertaken with the consideration that the way participants see themselves as teachers or learners, their concepts of how they actually perceive teaching or learning, and the values which they place on these concepts, play a significant part in their ability to succeed as lecturers or as students in higher education.

To summarise, this study is embedded in the interpretive approach for several reasons. First, the research questions were designed to explore complex experiences which revolved around students' and lecturers' beliefs about their teaching and learning in the field of Business. Secondly, my aim was to understand the participants' conceptions of teaching and learning. I wanted to explore some of the dilemmas that so often separate theory from practice. To do this, the most suitable way was to approach the study from a humanistic and qualitative stance. Thirdly, such an approach regards the quality of the relationship between the researcher and the participants as vital, in terms of its impact on the knowledge and information generated from people's experiences of a given phenomenon. Phenomenography as a research approach is embedded in exploring such understandings and experiences of participants. The position of phenomenography is discussed next.

4.4 Phenomenography

In this research study, I have drawn on the constructivist philosophy and employed a phenomenographic approach as the underlying framework of methodology. The phenomenographic approach aims to identify variations in the experience of a phenomenon, undertaken by a specific group of individuals. To get a sense of these variations, I must begin by exploring the ways people experience them. In fact, what binds constructivism and phenomenography together, is these 'experiential notions', experienced by the participants, shaped by events in the classroom. It is for these reasons that the constructivist approach, and in particular, the social constructivist together with the phenomenographic approach, are employed, in order to explore such experiences.

The ontological issue embedded in this argument – that there is no reality other than what is experience – is distinguished from the critical-realism position. Although the critical realism approach seeks to find some order and regularity in the participants' action, by showing their understanding of a particular phenomenon, this understanding, however, may lack consonance with their participants' actual experiences. In fact, Crotty (1998) describes critical-realism as an approach that seeks to challenge, rather than simply to understand experiences. Instead, Marton (1981) argued for an alternative form of inquiry, the phenomenography**.** Marton describes phenornenography as a study of the differing ways in which people experience, understand, and conceptualise reality in the world. Whilst one may argue that critical-realism offers us statements about reality, phenomenography may provide us with statements about the participants' conceptions of reality. Marton (1981) explains the difference between these two statements: In the first statement, we position ourselves towards the reality of the world and make statements about it. In the second

perspective, we position ourselves towards people's ideas about the reality of the world (or their experience of it) and we make statements about people's ideas about the world (or their experience of it). Marton calls these statements first – order and second – order perspectives (briefly discussed in previous chapters), the first statement reflecting a first - order perspective and the second statement reflecting a second - order perspective. I will agree with Marton's arguments for the use of the second – order perspective for this study, for two main reasons. Firstly, I want to find out the different ways in which lecturers and their students experience, understand or conceptualise various aspects of the reality concerning their subjects. Secondly, these descriptions (from the second - order perspectives) cannot be derived from the descriptions which we could arrive at from the first order perspective **(**Marton, 1981**)**. This means that if we really wish to explore the participants' conceptions of Business subjects, the answer cannot be derived from what we know and what people write about the subjects of Business Studies but we must focus on what people conceive, perceive and experience of the subject.

Phenomenography was developed, in the early 1970s, by Ference Marton and colleagues. It originated in the University of Goteborg, Sweden, where learning was explored from the perspective of the learners themselves. It has become very popular in the last two decades especially in Australia, UK, Sweden and Hong Kong. The word phenomenography derives from the Greek words '*phenomenon',* which means appearance, and *'graphie'*, which means description. Thus, phenomenography is a description of appearances. The general goal of phenomenographic research, therefore, is to develop and reveal the qualitatively different ways in which something is 'experienced' (Marton, 1994). The qualitatively different ways in which people can think about specific phenomena are often referred to as

categories of description. The issue of categories will be examined in Chapter 5. Developing categories of description to include the conceptions of lecturers and students is one of the aims of this study.

Trigwell (2000) identified five points describing phenomenography. First, phenomenography is non-dualist rather than dualist. In other words, reality is not seen as being 'out there', as in the case of critical-realism, but it is seen as being constituted by the relation between the individual and the phenomenon. Secondly, it is qualitative rather than quantitative. Thirdly, it is considered second order rather than first order. Fourthly, it focuses on the variation in the ways people experience a phenomenon, and finally, it includes a range of an individual's experiences in the form of categories. Trigwell's definition has been reflected to a large extent in tackling the research questions of the present study.

Phenomenography as an approach has many similarities with phenomenology (Marton, 1981). In both cases, researchers seek to uncover the nature of peoples' experiences. They make an attempt to understand these conceptions of reality by creating descriptions of these experiences. However, phenomenology differs from phenomenography. Phenomenology aims to develop a common set of conceptions held by the participants in a research study. Phenomenography, on the other hand, seeks to establish the different ways the participants of the study experience the phenomenon (Larsson, 1986). The purpose of this research is to describe the conceptions and not to explain their cause or their function. Thus, the aim of this study is to understand the *different* ways in which these lecturers and their students' experience, understand, perceive and interpret the phenomenon of their respective

disciplines. This involves identifying the conceptions and looking for their underlying meanings and the relationship between them (Entwistle, 1997; Marton, 1981).

In explaining this, Marton talked about the relationship between the 'how' and the 'what' of learning/teaching (Marton and Booth, 1997: 33). Each conception includes a 'what' (the object of learning/teaching) and a 'how' (the way of going about learning/teaching). It is also argued that peoples' descriptions rarely capture both dimensions; instead, they include fragments of a conception. It is, therefore, the responsibility of the researcher to unravel 'just what the fragments are fragments of' (Marton et al., 1993: 285).

In exploring 'just what the fragments are fragments of' and in order to shed further light on how a phenomenon is experienced, Marton et al., (1993) have used the term 'structure of awareness'. The structure of awareness theory implies that an individual's awareness is likely to include aspects of the phenomenon initiated by the context in which it is situated. In other words, awareness is understood as the totality of a person's experiences of the world, at each point in time (Marton and Tsui, 2004). It changes all the time, and in every situation, it is experienced against the background of previous experiences.

One of the criticisms of phenomenography is its tendency to connect peoples' experiences with their accounts of those experiences. Saljo (1997) and Marton (1994) reported that people's 'accounts' of their experiences with a particular phenomenon are not always equivalent to the ways in which they actually experience the phenomenon. However, the only way we can begin to understand these experiences are to ask each person to describe them. There is no other physical way to examine this. Observations will not tell us how

people experience a given phenomenon, especially if we accept the idea that conceptions are products of an interaction between the person and the phenomenon he/she experiences. Although we accept that phenomenographic results may not accurately describe 'ways of experiencing', they may, however, be very useful for education research.

Another criticism concerns whether researchers using phenomenography can be impartial - 'neutral foils' - while interviewing and analysing research data (Webb, 1997). Webb calls for researchers to make their views and beliefs known from the start, because the readers of the research need to be informed about all the variables that have affected the study's results. This calls for researchers, as stated in the foregoing discussion, to be particularly careful in recognising their own tendencies and biases which may influence the research findings. My personal opinion is that such self-examination may lead to additional insights into the data and, to some extent, a more critical examination of how one's own beliefs have affected the research as well as its results. I now turn to the actual design of the interpretive inquiry.

4.5 Methods of Collecting Data

This section presents an overview of the methods chosen to collect data for the study. Following the philosophical stance of the constructivist-interpretivist approach, it is obvious that this research favours the use of qualitative research methods.

In the past twenty years, researchers have examined students' and lecturers' beliefs about learning and teaching through a variety of methods. Researchers using quantitative methods have based their studies using various types of surveys and questionnaires (Biggs, 1991), whereas interpretive researchers, using qualitative methods, have based their research on methods such as in-depth interviews and observations. Each approach has been valuable and the findings have added significantly to the existing literature.

Following the ontological and epistemological arguments embedded in this study, research of beliefs and conceptions, in particular, is not easy to conduct. Conceptions about learning and teaching can be difficult to determine because such social phenomena exist not 'out there' but in the minds of the people and their interpretations (Robson, 2002). Conceptions are not usually conscious beliefs which students and lecturers could easily quantify. Thus, it is difficult for researchers to get a picture of conceptions using quantitative methods. Furthermore, quantitative researchers look for the existence of a 'constant relationship' between events, which can be straightforward when dealing with the natural world. However, when people are the focus of the study, as in the case of this research, this 'constant relationship' is so rare it may be even non-existent (Robson, 2002). Moreover my aim is not to emphasise causality or to seek to generalise results but to explore how academics and their students see their world of teaching and learning.

The emphasis which positivists place on quantitative measurements is seen by many social researchers and, more recently, by feminist researchers as insufficient in capturing the real meaning of experiences of social behaviour. By employing only standardised tools, as is often the characteristic of quantifiable data, quantitative research restricts experiences that are so crucial to conceptions. Standardisation results in converting the social world under study into an artificial world, which has nothing in common with the real world. Thus, the personal involvement of the researcher is required in order to see the world through the participants themselves, in this case students and lecturers.

In the interpretive approach, the 'self is the instrument that engages in the situation and makes sense of it' (Eisner, 1991: 34). Compared to quantitative researchers, interpretive researchers as 'human instruments', gather data themselves. As the researcher in this study, my aim was to interview the participants and collect the data myself. This allowed me to grasp meaning, pick up on subtleties, adapt to new situations and, generally, operate more effectively in all the complex situations that arose. Based on paradigmatic assumptions, Lincoln and Guba (1985: 39) summarised the reasons why the human instrument is so important: 'because it would be virtually impossible to devise a prior non human instrument with sufficient adaptability to encompass and adjust to the variety of realities that will be encountered'. In addition, by using one's self as an instrument, one is able to be responsive and flexible when and if required (Guba and Lincoln, 1981).

Furthermore, Lincoln and Guba (1985), have maintained that 'the design of interpretive inquiry cannot be given in advance; it must emerge, develop, and unfold' (225). This means

that methods and analysis will all evolve over time from the initial premise, as the researcher learns more about the views of the people involved in the research. In determining, therefore, the appropriate methods, one needs to consider what is being studied and the purpose and underlying assumptions of the research. Using an interpretive inquiry allowed me, whilst focusing on the main structure of the research, to change over time, as and when seemed appropriate**.**

Qualitative data, through the use of interpretive inquiry, consists primarily of words in the form of interviews and other methods, such as observation and field notes (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This implies that data cannot be collected in the absence of the participants who provided them, and this is why the researcher is required to be the primary instrument of data collection.

Thus, I can see that the most appropriate research method suitable is the one which will allow me to talk to the participants. I have chosen to use interviews so that I will be able to talk to all twelve participants directly. In order to enhance and understand the multiple conceptions or meanings that a particular group has for a particular phenomenon, phenomenographic researchers gather data from more than one person. In fact, one of the assumptions of phenomenography is that a single person may not express all aspects of a conception (Sandberg, 1995). As Sandberg states, 'in some cases a specific conception cannot be seen in its entirety in data obtained from a single individual, but only within data obtained from several individuals' (Sandberg 1995: 158). Another assumption of phenomenography is that it is extremely important that a person's conceptions are accessible, particularly through language (Svensson, 1997) in the form of extensive

descriptions of the phenomenon. Thus, another reason this research study favours interviews, is because it would be possible to bring such descriptions to the fore.

As already discussed, I have chosen not to include any observations of the participants. Previous studies of students' and teachers' conceptions (Martin and Balla, 1991; Dall'Alba, 1991) persuaded me that there was similarity between the teachers' descriptions in their interviews and their actual teaching approaches in the described situations. Within the context of this study, observations cannot clearly differentiate between objective and subjective information (Woods and Trexler, 2001), and what we are dealing with here is subjective information. One cannot observe what the participants are experiencing. Furthermore, one cannot sufficiently capture the setting because it is impossible to observe everything or have access to everything. In addition, I anticipated that some participants would find it difficult to act naturally when they know research is taking place. Further still, my experience tells me that some students would be more willing to talk openly, whilst others would be less, thus making the data entirely unrepresentative.

Although the limitations contained in the interview as a method of collecting data cannot be ignored, they can be avoided. It is possible, for example, to overcome the interviewer's perceptions and bias through sufficient preparation. One can, for example, learn how to interview, as well as know what to look for and what to ask, through practice**.** I have been able to do this, several times, with the help of colleagues and with the help of an enthusiastic friend, in particular.

Despite its limitations, discussed extensively later in this Chapter and Chapter 12, the interview as a method of collecting data remains the most appropriate one for this study. The alternative methods are perhaps too constraining, and 'often do not validly represent teachers' beliefs' (Richardson 1996: 107).

Finally, and in line with the aim of this research, I needed an approach where the researcher serves not only as the instrument of data collection, but also serves as the tool for data analysis. The two stay intertwined because data analysis begins during data collection (Wood, and Trexler, 2001). The procedures for data analysis are unique and specific to qualitative methods. In qualitative research, inductive data analysis is mostly used where analysis derives from the research data itself. In quantitative research, deductive analysis is preferred where the hypothesis is tested against the data. Analysis involves working with data, organising it, breaking it down, arranging it, searching for patterns, and revealing it (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). The data analysis process of the research is discussed in Chapter 5.

To conclude, interviewing has been described by Denzin and Lincoln (1994) as the favourite methodological tool of the interpretive researcher. The choice of method was mainly determined by the research questions, which sought to uncover students' and lecturers' experiences of the introductory Business courses in relation to teaching and learning. The data collected in the interviews provided a detailed conceptualisation of teaching and learning which would not have emerged if I had applied quantitative methods. By using interviews as a method, I hoped to gain a holistic rather than a disjointed

understanding of the experiences and insights of the lecturers and students who participated in my study, and generate research that is useful and practical within the context of education in higher education institutes.

4.5.1 The interview

I opted for a semi-structured interview conducted in a conversation and discussion manner. The use of this approach provides a 'degree of structure to the interview, while retaining flexibility to permit individuals to direct the interview' (Rowbotham, 2004: 226), which I believe suits this research.

In an attempt to create an appropriate atmosphere, I decided to call the interviews 'conversations' (Kvale, 1996), emphasising, in this way, the relaxed nature of what I was planning to do. This complies with Ashworth and Lucas (2000: 295), who suggested that the researcher's task is to achieve 'empathy and engagement', so that the participant is given the maximum opportunity to reflect on her/his own experience, and feel comfortable in talking about all of the aspects of the phenomenon of which she/he is aware. This I hoped would give each participant an opportunity to talk at length about their beliefs and provide me with a rich source of data. The questions were designed to be prompts rather than straightforward enquiry, so that participants could explore all areas of interest.

Semi-structured interviews are quite common in collecting data in qualitative research (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992; Patton, 1990). This form of interview is positioned somewhere between the structured and unstructured interview and it is generally focused on a particular topic and guided by some general questions. Patton (1990) refers to it as the 'interview-

guide approach'. The questions asked in this study were not always asked in exactly the same way, but were rather used as guides to the interview.

I decided to adopt the semi-structured type of interview for three main reasons. First, this approach provides not only extensive records of a participant's conceptions and experience, but it also offers extensive data for those who require 'evidence' to support an argument. I felt this was important if the results were to have any impact on policy makers within the college where I work, as well as in the education system of Cyprus at large. Secondly, it allows enough flexibility for the researcher and participants to clarify meaning and explore fully the issues raised during the interviewing process - 'the researcher gets to know the social world being studied first hand' (Barnes, 1992: 116). Thirdly, using open-ended interviews depends very much on the ability of the participants to recall and express extensively their beliefs and experience. This proved unproductive during the pilot study, as students were not able or willing to conceptualise and expand on their opinions. I found probing a good way of encouraging students to talk about their learning experiences and they answered only when there was enough probing. Because of such reticence, the idea of using open-ended interviews had to be abandoned from the beginning. In addition to providing information about the participants' understanding of their courses, the interview method offered a further opportunity to get closer to the participants and establish a rapport, thus allowing them to express themselves.

Each of the interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. On average, the conversations with the students were somewhat shorter than those with the lecturers. The average time for the students was 45 minutes and with the lecturers it was over an hour. This difference was

not because the schedules for students were any shorter, but rather due to the fact that lecturers were more talkative and able to elaborate on their responses. The interviews were tape recorded and then transcribed verbatim. Those with the lecturers were conducted in English, but the students had the option of expressing their views in Greek or both. Great care was taken so that the physical responses of the participants, such as facial expressions, body movements and laughter were recorded. This proved to be particularly difficult, as I had to improvise ways of capturing such expressions. The best way was to note it down as it happened and then expand on it when the interview was over.

Two interview schedules were used, one for the students and one for the lecturers. In broad terms, each interview schedule followed a uniform pattern involving four main sections:

- Experience of teaching and learning
- Role of lecturer/student
- Experience of methods of teaching/ learning
- Outcomes of teaching/learning

The students were interviewed twice for clarification purposes. The questions ranged widely over the four sections, but with a focus on conceptions regarding:

- The aim of teaching/learning
- The nature of good teaching
- Pleasant and unpleasant teaching/learning experiences
- Perceived problems in teaching/learning

- Beliefs about their specific courses
- Indicators of good teaching/learning

The questions were designed to encourage participants to reflect on and describe their experience as fully as possible. For example, lecturers were asked to describe lessons, ideas, facts, relationships and, in general how they understood their discipline. Students, on the other hand, were probed to see if they could explicitly state the purpose of their having taken Business courses.

The initial interviews began by encouraging participants to concentrate on a subject which they liked to talk about, provided that it was within the range of the subjects involved in the study. Questions such as how lecturers know whether students were learning and how they promoted learning and teaching, were intended to encourage reflection from varying perspectives, as were questions about what they found interesting and frustrating in teaching. Student questions included what they saw as the lecturer's role in the process of learning and how they saw learning in their specific subject.

I followed Saljo's (1997) suggestion, and included in the interview guide conceptual and discussion questions, which required students and lecturers to engage with real situations. Sheidman argues that 'people's behaviour becomes meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives of those around them' (1991: 10). One of the questions I asked the lecturers was how they taught a particular topic. This question was so worded as to provide a context that is similar for all lecturers, exploring their understanding of the phenomenon of interest. Marton (1995: 170) states that 'data originating from studies

where the participants give an account of their experiences of a particular situation, which is more or less the same for them all, is much more meaningful from a phenomenographic point of view'. This format is comparable to other phenomenographic studies in which the interviewees were asked first to undertake a task and then to describe how they had gone about the task (Marton and Booth, 1997).

Direct questions about the outcomes of teaching and learning in general were asked at the end of the interview. The aim of this was to provide critical checking (Kvale, 1996) on whether participants' descriptions appeared consistent with those given in relation to a particular subject. Reasons for any disparities between general and subject-related descriptions were explored. I tried to find out whether the participants were aware of more ways of experiencing than those asked by the questions in the interview schedule. At the end of each interview, the participants were asked if they wished to listen to the taped conversations or look at the transcripts, and were invited to make comments. The interviews were conducted during the Spring semester of 2005.

A criticism of interviews in which the researcher asks predetermined questions is that, by providing a structure for the interview, the researcher loses the opportunity to understand how the participants might choose to organise the topic being discussed. Whilst this is a reasonable criticism, the semi-structured interview was chosen in this particular study because it enables me to collect data which could be compared across participants, and in addition, provides a focus on the question being investigated. Because the questions were guides to the interview and were sometimes asked in different ways, the form of the interview was sensitive to the ways the participants arranged their responses. A further

criticism in attempting to use interviews to investigate learning/teaching is the underlying assumption that participants, especially students (in the initial stages of their courses), will be sufficiently aware of their learning processes and, most importantly, that they will be able to voice those learning processes. Indeed, from my own experiences, many of the answers given by students focused almost entirely on preparation for quizzes and exams. It was rare for any student to be able to describe how they learned beyond these two activities. A lot of probing and encouragement was unavoidable so students could expand more widely on their beliefs.

More specifically, Saljo (1997) and Fleming (1986) argue that interview data cannot be used without taking into consideration the social context of the interview and the reasons why people say what they say in such situations. Indeed, since his earliest work, Saljo has been concerned with how the interview context might be influencing the nature of the responses given. Saljo (1997) suggests that expressions in an interview indicate 'the attempt to fulfil one's communicative obligations when being asked a question or a wish not to lose face when confronted with an abstract and maybe difficult question' (177). He goes on to say that 'we learn how to experience events in life' (184). We learn about socially appropriate ways of talking about our experience of a phenomenon, and we frequently borrow accounts from stories which other people have told us. It is assumed, therefore, that it is difficult to disconnect what is said in an interview from its communicative function in that particular context. Although there is a possibility of this happening, it may be equally argued that the interview is in fact a 'joint social accomplishment of interviewee and interviewer' (Fleming 1986: 553). Similarly, Kvale (1996) maintains that the interviewee's statements are 'co-authored'.

A further suggestion as to how one can overcome this problem is to try and observe what is happening in the context being studied. Although Fleming (1986) admits that there is often not much to 'see' when students are, for example, revising for an examination, on the other hand, Saljo (1997) proposes what seems to me a more practical solution: to question the practices people use when they are trying to achieve something, rather than asking the sort of abstract questions that are common in phenomenographic research.

Despite these drawbacks, the interview for me remains the most appropriate method of collecting data in the case of this study. If the goal of the research is to understand the conceptions of teaching and learning, then it would seem logical to me to ask those in a position to offer such answers - the lecturers and the students themselves.

4.5.2 The participants

The participants in this study were five lecturers (two females and three males) and twelve students (five males and seven females). All lecturers taught one or more of the core introductory courses in the School of Business. As a group, these lecturers' teaching experience in the college, ranged from one to fourteen years. They taught different Business courses ranging from Finance and Banking to International Business and Management. The students were all freshmen who had already taken or were studying on one of the introductory courses. The courses were: Introduction to Marketing; Introduction to Accounting; Introduction to Economics and Introduction to Management. The composition of the participants reflected that of the lecturers and students of the school in terms of sex and age (see Appendices I and II).

The first stage in the selection process included an initial meeting with each of the participants who had expressed their willingness to participate. The aim of the meeting was to discuss and explain the purpose of the research and to arrange for the interview. At this meeting, I was able to discuss in a more detailed manner the research study, providing at the same time a brief written note describing the study and outlining the ethical considerations. The second stage was to meet each participant individually for the interview. For the lecturers, this was arranged to take place at their offices and at their own convenience. For the students, this was arranged to take place either at my office or in a convenient classroom in the college. At the interview, the participants were then asked to sign a consent form.

4.5.3 Sampling

Following the philosophical stance underpinning the qualitative research approach, the drive for the traditional representative sampling procedure used in quantitative research does not apply here. I no longer seek to generalise measurements to a wider population, but rather to uncover variation, in as much detail as possible, in a specific area. The sampling procedure that is suited for this particular research study is what is termed as 'purposive sampling'. This means choosing the participants so that one has maximum diversity in the focus areas. It also follows that in order to achieve any real depth to the findings, it was necessary to choose a small group of participants with whom to conduct interviews. This is in line with phenomenographic research which typically derives its description from a small sample of participants drawn from a population.

I adopted a purposive sampling strategy because this strategy involves seeking the highest diversity in characteristics considered salient to the research question, rather than seeking a sample that is proportionally representative of the whole population, as is common in statistical research designs. The characteristics I took into consideration were first year students taking Business introductory courses, gender, age and background. The lecturers chosen had to be teaching Business introductory courses. Their characteristics reflected the lecturer population of the School of Business.

Using a purposive sampling procedure excluded the possibility of asking for volunteers, an option that I had already rejected as the pilot study had revealed few students were likely to come forward. Both lecturers and students had to be willing to take part in the study. Of the six lecturers who were approached, one could not attend the interviews. All students but two attended the interview. The next section deals with issues regarding the trustworthiness of the research.

4.6 Assuring the Trustworthiness of the Research

Researchers are encouraged to reflect on their interpretations and are reminded that their trustworthiness is dependent on being able to demonstrate how they were reached (Boulton and Hammersley, 1996; Mason, 1996). Like quantitative ones, qualitative researchers aim for trustworthy results within their studies. However, the principles for evaluating these differ significantly from those used in quantitative research. For a start, rather than just evaluating a study's validity and reliability according to the usage of quantitative methodological rules, interpretive researchers place much of this 'responsibility squarely on the reader's shoulders of the research as s/he constructs meaning from the text' (Woods and

Trexter, 2001: 75). Therefore it is important, that readers are able to see the text from the beginning through the eyes of an interpretivist.

Positivists typically talk of validity, reliability and objectivity as some of the methods used to assess the worth of a research study. These assumptions, however, do not relate directly to interpretive research. Some researchers maintain the same terms of validity and reliability while proposing conceptually different methods for evaluating the research's worth (LeCompte and Goetz, 1982; Patton, 1990). Others use different terminology to communicate the same meaning. Lincoln and Guba (1985), for example, have offered equivalent terms, which may be more suitable for interpretive research. They have suggested that interpretive researchers are concerned with (a) the credibility (internal validity) of their findings, (b) the transferability or how well their working hypotheses would 'fit' in another context (external validity), (c) the dependability (reliability) or testing for consistency by a second evaluator, and (d) the conformability of the data (objectivity).

Although interpretive researchers differ as regards the terms they use to ensure high standards of results, they do however agree that such procedures do exist and it is up to the individual researcher which procedures to use. Furthermore, these concepts need to be framed within the context of the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the research approach being used. Evidently, phenomenography has much in common with the notion underlying other qualitative research traditions, and 'thus draws on their practices, as well as having differences that necessitate its own set of practices' (Akerlind, 2005: 330).

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I will now discuss those procedures that proved best suited to this study in order to ensure its rigour and trustworthiness. More specifically, I will explain how issues of validity, reliability and trustworthiness can be considered in relation to interpretive research in general, and to phenomenographic research in particular within the context of this study.

4.6.1 Reliability

Reliability usually refers to the consistency or 'replicability' of the findings of one's research. In other words, it is concerned with whether another researcher could reasonably be expected to get the same results. On issues of reliability, Marton (1986) argues that it is possible that two different researchers may discover different categories of description while working on the same data individually. However, once the categories have been found, they must be described in such a way that all researchers can understand and use them. Marton compares this process to botanists who discover a new plant species on an island. If the new species does not appear to fit into an already existing category, the botanist must develop a new category of classification for it, and it is highly probable that a separate botanist would develop a qualitatively different category for that new species. However, once the botanist has developed and described a category, the category is now accessible and available for classifying plants that any botanist finds. Indeed, once the category is developed and described, it becomes useful to others who use the results of the study.

Sandberg (1995) suggests that one can strive to maintain a critical perspective of how their subjectivity may influence the research and ensure reliability by applying what he refers to as 'interpretive awareness' (210). Applying interpretive awareness involves five steps. By

following these steps, I hope to be able to make the findings clear to readers by fully detailing them and presenting examples that illustrate them (Guba, 1981; Sandberg, 1995, 1997; Kvale, 1996). These are:

- Remaining oriented to the phenomenon as and how it appears throughout the research process.
- Describing rather than explaining experiences.
- Treating all aspects of individuals' descriptions as equally important.
- Searching for the meaning of the experiences.
- Focusing on the 'what' and 'how' of the individuals' experiences as well as on the relationship between the 'what' and 'how'.

In this study, the use of detailed notes and extensive audio tape recordings provided a check on what was recorded and matched with what occurred. This enhanced its reliability.

4.6.2. Validity

One of the most useful aspects of Lincoln and Guba's work is the way in which they question the issues of internal and external validity. If one adopts a constructivist epistemological approach, it can be shown that these criteria become meaningless. Indeed, a new set of criteria for trustworthiness is needed in the new paradigm. For each of these traditional constructs, Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified the underlying issue and then suggested alternative measures for testing and demonstrating whether the results can be trusted.

Thus, the traditional definition of internal validity does not comply with the principles of interpretive research. Instead of internal validity, Lincoln and Guba suggest a new term namely 'credibility' or 'authenticity'. The underlying issue here is the extent to which the study establishes 'how things are' not the truth, but rather the multiple constructions that are held by the participants. Moreover, it questions the extent to which the findings of the study represent the participant's reality.

The position taken in many research studies, as already discussed, is that reality is subjective and created by individuals - in this case the perspectives of the students and lecturers as well as my own. My task, therefore, was to represent, as accurately as possible, the reality of each participant, whilst acknowledging at the same time my position as a translator of those experiences, thus getting nearer to the 'reality' of my own position.
By presenting the depth and breadth of the interpretive framework, the researcher allows the reader to develop a sense of the competence of the explanations being considered in the inquiry. In the absence, therefore, of external tests of validity, the trustworthiness of the findings may depend more on the researcher's credibility than on any other factor (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

The validity of the study can also be evaluated to some extent by the degree to which participants have been true and honest in their responses. According to Sudman and Bradburn (1974), the participants may affect the validity of the study. It may be true that the participant's accounts of their experiences in relation to their conceptions of teaching and learning may not be equivalent to the ways in which they actually experience this phenomenon. However, the only way we can begin to understand how they experience

conceptions is to ask each of them to describe them. As already stated, there is no other physical way of examining a participant's brain to obtain this data. That is why observations are not recommended for this particular study. One may just have to accept the fact that phenomenographical results may not always accurately describe ways of experiencing a given phenomenon.

There are, however, ways to eliminate this problem. One is through the structure of the interview. I constructed an interview guide to elicit responses to comparable questions. Also, by piloting the interview, I was able to acquire knowledge of interview procedures and techniques. As the interview focuses on understanding the conceptions about the introductory Business courses, the need to determine connections between responses and reality is diminished.

Likewise, communication and interaction during the interview may also be a problem in terms of validity. Borg and Gall (1979) outlined procedures through which this problem can be controlled. One suggestion, which I followed, was to try and minimise the use of technical and difficult terms and, instead, use plain language so that both the participants and I were answering questions from a common standpoint. By asking the same question in another way and providing an additional scenario to reveal conceptions about learning and teaching, I also enhanced validity of the data. In addition, I allowed students to answer in Greek when they could not express their views in English. This, however, may have been a drawback, as some of the questions and answers had to be translated from Greek to English. This meant that details or nuances of meaning in responses may have been lost in the translation. The sensitivity of the 'research instrument' in this case may have been

reduced. However, this was somewhat compensated for by my being able to familiarise myself with the participants and establish a rapport with them. It should also be noted that as a lecturer in the Business department, I had substantial interaction with the participants of this study. The fact that all interviews were transcribed verbatim and detailed data on the participants' response were recorded also helped in enhancing the validity of the study.

On the other hand, interpretivists are concerned whether their claims about the knowledge they have acquired through their research are defensible. Weber, (2004) proposed that colleagues should be able to examine the evidence the researcher has collected, the research process that s/he has used, and perhaps some aspects of the researcher's life-world, and conclude that the claims made are reasonable. Colleagues do not necessarily have to agree with the claims, but they should be willing to concede that the researcher's conclusions are plausible. In fact, I found comfort and reassurance when very often I discussed the progress, difficulties and findings with a particular friend who was enthusiastic and willing to participate in my study, and also with follow students who happened to be engaged in similar research studies.

External validity concerns the generalisability of results. Generalisability is another type of validity related to qualitative research and it interacts with the ways in which a phenomenon is experienced by a particular group of people involved in a particular study. This refers to 'the extent to which one can expand the account of a specific population to other persons, times, or settings' (Maxwell 1992: 293). Using Marton's explanation of the outcomes of phenomenographic research, generalisability seems to be an issue. Specifically, there are two aspects of generalisability: internal and external. Internal

generalisability refers to the extent to which the description of categories is generalisable within a population**.** External generalisability refers to the extent to which these categories are generalisable to other population, for example, lecturers and students of other institutes and regions in Cyprus. However, as already stated, the aim of this study is not to develop generalisable data. As this kind of research has not been previously undertaken in higher education in Cyprus, the knowledge derived should be seen as theory development or as providing information for future research. Thus, research generalisation can be seen as involving two aspects, the original research and those who seek to make use of or build on it. In this case, it is important for me to make the context of the study and the characteristics of the participants involved explicit, so that others can make a judgement about the applicability of the findings within their own context. This is why interpretive researchers use 'elaborated descriptions' when writing up their studies, to provide a context which in a way allows readers to determine its usefulness within other contexts.

Finally, in helping others to judge the credibility and generalisability of a study, one should provide a clear description of its design and procedure. Patton (1990) has stated that these issues centre on three interrelated elements: first, rigorous techniques and methods; second, the credibility of the researcher; and third, a philosophical stance in the interpretive approach and qualitative methods used. I believe that all three are crucial and great care has been taken to include and implement them in the present study.

4.6.3. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in a qualitative study can be achieved in several ways (Lincoln and Guba 1985) and by providing answers to the following two questions. How can a researcher

persuade her/his audiences that the findings of the study are of any value? What criteria can we develop to generate this trustworthiness? Among the techniques that Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest are prolonged engagement and triangulation. Prolonged engagement means to take time to learn the 'culture' of the environment where the research is taking place; testing for any misunderstandings caused by myself or by the participants and generally building trust. I have been working in the institution where the research was conducted, for many years and consequently I am familiar with the 'culture' of the institution. I know almost all the lecturers and some of the students, and was able to build trust that would enrich the quality of information obtained in the interviews. Although being an 'insider' might have proven problematic in gaining sufficient 'critical distance', I have tried to eliminate this by prolonging and repeating the interviews whenever it was thought necessary.

Thus, most interviews were long, and I often engaged in extended conversations in order to construct meaning. This practice was essential in helping to reduce the 'researcher's' effect on the interviews and to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. Lincoln and Guba suggested that researchers should take steps to validate information against at least one other source, for example a second interview. This cross validation is referred to as 'triangulation' (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In this study, I have gone back whenever I thought it was necessary and made clarifications and modifications to the interviews.

To summarise, Woods and Trexler (2001) stated that interpretive studies will not be seen as credible if assessed through the eyes of a positivist. It is important, therefore, that techniques and methods must be clearly described and explained to enable others to think about the study and judge its worth. Perceptions of the researcher's ability and experience lie at the centre of credibility, 'because the individual serves as both the instrument of data collection and the tool for data analyses' (Woods and Trexler, 2001: 76). The primary aim of this section was to highlight the need for rigour for this research study by outlining the research's trustworthiness, validity and reliability.

4.7 Ethical Issues Concerning the Research

Through personal reflection, I came to understand that one's ethical practices are put into action where research ethics codes, committees and procedures may not be available (Guillemin, 2004). Although ethics procedures play an important part in stating the principles that are applicable to research, their role is sometimes limited. For example, ethics procedures cannot help, when in the middle of the interview session, unexpected situations arise, and one is forced to make instant decisions about ethical concerns. Furthermore, whom we include and whom we exclude as participants in our research are also important ethical issues. Moreover, the interpretations and analyses, how the findings are presented, and to whom the findings are made available, are all part of the ethical awareness of one's behaviour. Reflexivity in research is therefore a process of critical reflection both on the kind of knowledge produced from research and how that knowledge is generated (Guillemin, 2004). Beyond the reflective awareness one is able to exercise, the usual measures to ensure ethical practices such as informed consent, sincerity about the research aim, and reassurance of anonymity, were adopted.

In complying with the BERA revised ethical guidelines (2004), all those involved in the research were informed, verbally and later in writing, prior to the interview, about the purpose of the research, the process, why their participation was necessary, how it would be used, and how and to whom it would be reported. As for the issue of absolute anonymity, I realised early on that it was difficult to maintain. In a small community like a college, everybody knows each other and is aware of what is going on. The approach adopted was to ensure the anonymity of the participants as far as it was possible and as far as I could make it possible. I tried to ensure anonymity of the participants through the use of pseudonyms and codes.

I also provided a consent form through which the signatures of the participants were required as an indication of their willingness to participate before starting data collection. I assured all participants of their right to withdraw from the research whenever they wished and without any obligations. In addition, they were given the right to listen to the taped conversations or look at the transcripts. They were also invited to make comments if they so wished. Luckily for me, no participant withdrew, nor were there any other problems.

Throughout the Chapter, it was my intention to stress that, as researchers, we need to be aware of the fact that, by our involvement with participants, we may influence the direction of the research in terms of which participants to use, how to structure the research questions, what questions we ask in interviews and so forth. It follows therefore that, as human beings, we are in some way part of the phenomenon we are studying. So, by exploring lecturers' and students' experiences of their subjects, we can draw on their

knowledge of what it means to be a student or a lecturer of Business Studies, and to some extent, we can shed light on the role of higher education in the life of the participants.

4.8 Brief Summary

The purpose of this Chapter was to outline the theoretical and philosophical rationale for the methodology of the research. The initial goal was to establish a justification for adopting an interpretive epistemological approach, and the implications this has for the knowledge contribution to be made in this thesis. The constructivist – interpretivist approach for exploring students' and lecturers' experience of teaching/learning was adopted. At the same time, reasons for not adopting the critical realism position were discussed. Elements of the interpretive and phenomenographic approach on which this research was based were critically evaluated. It was considered necessary that the overall trustworthiness of the research was evaluated in terms of its validity and reliability. The methods of data collection in the form of semi-structured interviews were analysed and explored. Finally, issues concerning the ethical implications of this research study were raised.

CHAPTER 5

Data Analysis

THE PROCESS

5.2 Introduction

The data analysis section of the thesis is organised in to three separate chapters. Chapter 5 outlines the process of the analysis, Chapter 6 draws on the data analysis and findings of the teaching conceptions of lecturers, and Chapter 7 explains the data analysis and findings of the learning conceptions of students.

This chapter concentrates primarily on the process I have undertaken in analysing the data and is essentially divided into three main phases. Each phase is reflected in the steps I followed for the analysis. The chapter begins with the phenomenographic analysis, followed by the initial stages of the analysis, the formation of categories and finally the actual organisation of the data.

In this section, I have tried to draw on my experiences so far and to illustrate how using a particular data analysis method within the context of a research group gave me time, space and a context for practising a degree of reflexivity during the analytic stages of the research. In exercising reflexivity, attention is drawn to the importance of the ways in which both the personal as well as emotional responses of the participants can influence the interpretations of their accounts. Few methods, however, offer concrete ways of dealing with such issues.

5.2 The Phenomenographic Analysis

In this chapter, I will describe how I worked with the data, organising, analysing and compiling it so as to acquire an understanding of the phenomenon. This was important in order to answer the research questions and present data in a clear manner. In the qualitative perspective, the data analysis represents the process of searching and arranging the interview transcripts for a meaningful understanding of the information gathered, so that we are able to present to others what was revealed (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998). The data was analysed using the phenomenographic approach (Marton and Booth, 1997). The central feature of this was discovering variation in meaning in the respondents' experiences of their learning and teaching.

From the outset, several considerations should be taken into account when adopting a phenomenographic analysis. First, the outcomes from such studies are based on the variation across all of the interview transcripts rather than of each participant. Thus, any one interview may contain more than one of the categories of description constituting the study (Ashwin, 2006). Second, the conceptions described represent a 'picture' of the experience of the participants at that particular time. Thus, the aim is not to classify or categorise any individual participant as having a particular conception, but rather to illustrate the full range of conceptions held by the group as a whole. Thus, the categories that emerged described the range of the different ways in which this particular group illustrated their experiences.

Third, since the outcome space of the phenomenographic research is the result of the relation between the researcher and the data, it is accepted that the outcome may not be the only possible one which could be developed from the data (Marton and Booth, 1997). Nevertheless, it is perhaps important to note that the outcome space together with the categories can in fact be persuasively argued for on the basis of the data (Akerlind, 2005).

As already stated in the previous chapter, the interview transcripts formed the data for the study. The interviews allowed me to collect data in such a way as to reveal the different ways the participants experienced learning and teaching. Such an approach has been used to study conceptions of learning, both in adults and children (for example. Marton et al., 1993, 1997). However, the present study differs from most previous studies in that it attempts to identify conceptions of teaching and learning rather than teaching or learning alone, and involves both the lecturers' and students' conceptions simultaneously.

The main purpose of the analysis was to identify the number of qualitative categories and the ways in which the participants experience the phenomenon. Booth (1997) illustrated this approach as consisting of:

> Studying the interview transcripts, both individually and alongside one another, studying sets of extracts both in and out of their original contexts, seeking distinct similarities and difference. The researcher emerges himself or herself in the material, trying to see the total meaning in what the research subjects said and did , resolving apparent contradictions, knitting together as whole a picture of the meaning of the phenomenon as possible, not only for individual subjects but also for the group. Eventually a spectrum is seen (138).

There is no single accepted approach for a phenomenographic analysis. Booth's description is just one accepted approach. Other approaches place the focus of the analysis on whole

transcripts or parts of transcripts or on individual transcripts or collections of quotations in a transcript. My approach focuses on the transcripts as a whole, and quoting from the individual transcripts in order to capture the meaning of the learning and teaching experiences. It is important to note at this stage, that categories stemming from the phenomenographic analysis do not entail people's full description of experiences. Instead they are descriptions of the 'dimensions of the experience' that make up the main aspects of the variation, and do not include dimensions for which there is little or no variation within the group (Trigwell, 2000).

In the next section, I will describe the process I followed in analysing the data. For the sake of convenience, I have divided the process into three phases. Phase 1 describes the initial stages of the analysis, phase 2 illustrates the process I have taken in coding the data, and phase 3 explains how I went about recording and organising the data using the NUD*IST N6 system for the presentation of the results.

5.3 Phase 1 – The Initial Stages of the Analysis

The first phase of the analysis began when I was collecting data from my first two students interviewees. I started constructively thinking about the analysis when I had completed the two initial interviews. Both interviews were conducted in English. However, I found early on that speaking in English to Cypriot students, whose mother tongue is Greek, created an atmosphere that was too formal for this study. This made me reconsider my approach, so that in the subsequent interviews, I left the choice of language up to the participants. Whilst I was interviewing the students, I began taking notes and recording information I could not capture on tape, such as body language and gestures used (Bodgan and Biklen, 1998;

Merriam, 1988). I transcribed the taped information almost immediately after interviewing and right away, I began reading the transcriptions to make sense of the emerging pattern. Addison (1989) recommended that early analysis helps the researcher to start discovering patterns and relationships as he or she moves forward and backward in organising and thinking about the data. This meant highlighting meaningful concepts and making notes in the margin of the transcripts. These first stages of analysing the data, whilst it is being collected, provided me with the opportunity to look for recurring patterns, themes and any relationships amongst the emerging concepts. Miles and Huberman (1994) argued that early analysis is critical, as it helps the researcher to reflect and think about the data at the same time as it is being collected and to develop new ideas for collecting the remaining data.

During the same period, I started reading and studying the literature concerning conceptions of teaching and learning. Examining the literature at the same time as collecting data helps the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the given phenomenon (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992).

I found the initial analysis very useful. It helped me develop new questions and to reorganise to some extent the structure of the interview schedule. It also enabled me to identify gaps and themes on which to focus in the next interviews. The outcomes of this initial process and the early interpretations of the data allowed me to develop the first set of preliminary categories which had already begun to emerge from the interviews.

5.4 Phase 2 – The Formation of Categories

As already stated, the outcome of phenomenographic research is a set of rationally related categories which describe the phenomenon and which are 'defined by their qualitative differences from the other categories' (Loughland et al., 2002: 190). It is important to note once again, that the categories developed do not represent a structured process through which individual participants pass, but rather represent a moment of that particular time of the participants' experiences (Marshall and Case, 2005).

The formation of categories, therefore, is considered an important analytic tool for reducing an enormous amount of data from individual descriptions to a more readily understood form. In quantitative research, similar techniques are used, such as factor analysis. There are other methods for analysing qualitative data and displaying the results; however, the aim of this study is to discover a limited number of linked categories of description.

Once I had collected and transcribed all the data, I began reading through the whole set of transcripts a number of times until I felt familiar with it. Throughout the reading of the transcripts, it was important that I kept the research questions in mind. In other words: 'What do the transcripts tell me about the way the students and their lecturers understand their learning and teaching of their Business courses?' The fundamental concern here was to understand the meaning of learning and teaching inherent in the statements. Since many of the statements for each probe question were very short, it was sometimes difficult to fully realise the meaning expressed in the statements. For example, when 'understanding' was mentioned, it was not always obvious as to how the participants achieved

understanding and whether it was understanding the topic per se or its meaning. For instance, students could have been referring to obtaining knowledge by understanding or by just being able to perform a task without understanding (Pillay and Boulton-Lewis, 2000). As a result, I noticed early on, that care needed to be taken in making interpretations from such statements.

The actual analysis began by looking for extracts from the data that might be relevant to the research perspective. This was done by assigning a descriptive word or phrase to each unit of notes. This process is referred to as 'coding'. Coding is interpreting or making decisions about what things mean. Not everything in the transcripts is necessarily useful. Indeed some of the information gathered was judged as irrelevant. In fact, coding begins the process of selecting what is meaningful from the rest of the data. This helps to seek out what is significant and how to make relationships and create patterns. Thus, coding provides us with a set of lenses through which data can be viewed in a given situation.

I started analysing the data collected from the student transcripts first. I began coding the data by underlining phrases and words that seemed worthy of recording. Then I grouped these words and phrases into relevant themes. These themes represented the meaning and the general understanding I have gained from the data. My next step was to type up all these themes. This process helped me to form the initial set of categories which I thought reflected the students' initial conceptions of their learning. I consequently went back to the transcripts many times over until I felt I had a logical, firm set of categories. The next stage was to go back to the individual transcripts once again and analyse them in terms of the categories that were established. This was done in order to question the similarities and

differences represented in the categories. I noticed that a particular pattern was beginning to emerge from the answers to the following questions:

- What is the student's experience of learning his/ her particular course?
- How does the student experience what he/she is learning?
- What does the student conceptualise as facilitating his/ her learning?
- How does the role of the lecturer assist learning?
- How does the student conceptualise the outcome of learning?

Once I was quite familiar with coding and categorising the data from the students' transcripts, I started going through the data collected from the lecturers. The process of coding seemed much easier the second time round. Again, I began the analysis by reading the total pool of transcripts before focusing on the individual transcripts. I concentrated mainly on the lecturers' descriptions of their teaching. I quickly formed an initial set of categories describing lecturers' conception of teaching. As in the case of the students the categories focused on the following thematic questions:

- What are the lecturers' understanding and experience of the nature of teaching?
- How do the lecturers conceive the purpose of teaching Business subjects?
- How do the lecturers conceive their teaching methods?
- How do the lecturers perceive their role in interacting with the students?
- How do the lecturers conceive the outcome of teaching?

The preliminary questions were refined and redefined until they could accommodate all perspectives indicated by the participants. Sets of categories for both groups (lecturers and students) were now starting to form. I had collected a total of 17 transcripts of data, varying from 15 to 25 pages per transcript, a total of 270 typed pages.

To summarise, then, the second phase of the analysis was devoted entirely to extracting the categories from the transcripts. The categories were not pre-determined but emerged from the data. They were identified from the whole transcripts to form the descriptions of the experiences that constituted the key aspects of the variations in question. The responses were interpreted and categorised into conceptions of learning and teaching. In line with the phenomenographic tradition, a limited number of categories of description were formed.

5.5 Phase 3 –The Organisation of Data, - using NUD*IST, N6

The next phase in my data analysis was to transfer these categories into a more manageable user-friendly set-up so that they could be easily recorded, organised and retrieved.

At the beginning of June 2005, I managed to convince the head of the Business department to provide the lecturers with a training seminar for the, then, new NUD*IST, N6 software. I underwent a three-day training session and needed another three to four days to fully understand and use the software. N6 was the latest version of NUD*IST code-based on qualitative analysis software. By using the software, it was possible to import documents singly or in batches in plain text, allowing the researcher to code on screen as well as monitor and manage the emergence of ideas.

It also allows you to bring together all the material regarding a specific code in one place. This facilitates 'constant comparisons of all indicators of a given code or concept' (Legeiwe, 1998: 277). One must remember, however, that whilst this software allows you to organise the data, it does not analyses the data for you. This is a job entirely for the researcher.

All the interview transcripts were imported into the system. Using the already formed categories from the earlier phases, I went through all the data, assigning text and firming up the theoretical properties of each category. The categories are referred to as 'nodes' in the NUD*IST, N6 system. Nodes are especially useful for collecting together all the text about a particular topic or theme. Based on this process, a tentative coding system of nodes was devised for both students and lecturers.

In practice, this meant scrolling down each transcript on the computer screen, and whenever a unit of information was identified that fitted under any of the categories (nodes) previously developed, it was assigned to that category. The length of each unit of information varied from one sentence to several paragraphs, depending on the idea being conveyed. Also a unit could belong to two or more categories. The software stores the unit of information by category in the computer memory. During the actual coding of the transcripts some of the categories were modified, expanded, or deleted. Once the interview transcripts were coded, a complete print-out of the codes for the participants was generated. This print-out provided a quick reference to all units of information coded, which facilitated the subsequent analysis and the write-up processes. Not all of the categories generated were used in the final report.

At the end of the process it was possible to reduce the final number of categories to that of six for both students and lecturers.

5.6 Brief Summary

In this chapter, I have tried to outline in three distinct phases how I went about organising the data and forming the categories of conceptions. It is no exaggeration to say that the data reduction and the analysis took much longer than I had anticipated. The whole process centred on the categorisation of data through the use of coding. This activity also proved to be a very difficult and lengthy task. The findings of the students' and lecturers' conceptions of learning and teaching are presented in the following chapters, Chapter 6 and Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 6

Data Analysis and Presentation of Findings

LECTURERS' CONCEPTIONS OF TEACHING

6.2 Introduction

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section examines the process involved in the formation and development of the teaching categories, and the second section presents and describes the findings. Before I continue with the first section, I feel I need to introduce the participants, as I will start referring to them by name within this and the following chapters. Pseudonyms have been assigned to all the participants who took part in this research study.

6.2 Introducing the Lecturers

This section merely introduces the five lecturers but further information regarding each participant is to be found in Appendix I. All five lecturers were interviewed during the Spring semester of 2005 and I managed to complete the interviews in late May of 2005. My first interviewee was James. James is a Finance and Economics lecturer and was interviewed for the Introduction to Economics course. Kate, on the other hand, is a Human Resource Management lecturer and teaches the Introduction to Management. Elias is a lecturer in International Business and was also interviewed for the Introduction to Management course. Mary was interviewed for the Introduction to Accounting and teaches general Accounting courses. Anton is a Marketing and Hotel Management lecturer and was the last to be interviewed for the Introduction to Marketing course.

6.3 Forming Categories of Conceptions of Teaching

In categorising the data into conceptions of teaching, the following considerations were made: First, as noted in the previous chapter, the data analysis does not emphasise the experience of individual lecturers, but rather the collective experience of the interview group. As Marton (1986) puts it, 'the boundaries separating individuals are abandoned and interest is focused on the 'pool of meanings' discovered in the data' (42-43).

Secondly, the meaning of the experiences of the individual lecturer is formed on the basis of the phenomenon that is experienced at some time, and the specific aspects of it perceived as most relevant to their current circumstances (Akerlind, 2005). Emphasising such a relationship provides a way of looking at the phenomenon holistically, despite the fact that it may be experienced differently. The aim is to simultaneously portray the whole as well as the parts in a single outcome space of variation. This is seen as a powerful method in aiding our understanding of the phenomenon (Marton, 1981, 1994; Akerlind, 2005).

Thirdly, although categories may be identified as different from each other, there are no rigid or well-defined boundaries between them. This is clearly illustrated with the conceptions of teaching revealed in this study and confirmed by several other studies. Furthermore, participants showed evidence of having more than one conception. Martin and Ramsden (1992) for example, have specified in their research that participants may develop conceptual positions at different rates. It is therefore possible for participants to hold more than one conception at the same time.

Fourthly, many researchers (for example, Dall'Alba, 1991) use the term 'hierarchical' when referring to the relationships between conceptions. In this research study, the six categories formed are also seen as linked in a 'hierarchical' relationship based on the lecturers' experience. That is, the experience of teaching represented by later categories includes experience of teaching and conceptions represented by earlier categories. Whilst each additional category has elements in common with previous categories, they also represent something new in the experience of teaching. Some researchers like Martin, Trigwell, Prosser, and Ramsden (2003) argue that higher categories in the hierarchy ladder include qualitatively new but different elements, and become increasingly complex, yet still contain core elements of the previous category.

Fifthly, the categories of description that were produced in this way also have a structural significance in that they convey a relationship between the participants' focus of attention and their understanding of the phenomenon. In this way, the group of quotations emerging from the transcripts are arranged and rearranged into categories, and finally redefined in terms of core meanings (Marton, 1986). Furthermore, the themes that were formed were interpreted in terms of selected quotations from all the interviews.

The actual process of developing categories involved moving across and between the following aspects:

- The variation in how a certain phenomenon or experience is conceived or experienced by the lecturers
- The relations between the categories of the conceptions of teaching

- The hierarchy formed within these categories

Finally, the categories that best described the data were derived from the transcripts as exhaustively as possible and no material was omitted. In this way, the conceptions of teaching were discovered and described as faithfully as possible.

6.4 Presenting the Categories of the Lecturers' Conceptions of Teaching

This section presents the data findings of the interviews collected from the lecturers. It aims to reveal their conceptions and experiences of teaching. The lecturers' conceptions of teaching are outlined in a set of six categories. The categories illustrate the experiences which the participants brought to their everyday teaching. It was quite evident from the beginning that the lecturers varied in their ways of experiencing their respective courses. Following these descriptions, the logical relations between the categories are analysed in greater depth in Chapter 9. The six categories that emerged from the data are as follows:

Category A: Teaching as providing and transmitting subject knowledge

Category B: Teaching as presenting the information in a way so that the students can obtain the concepts of the introductory subjects

Category C: Teaching as helping students to learn (and understand) their introductory subjects through practical participation and assessment

Category D: Teaching as the development of the students into professional, 'well-behaved' human beings and how the role of the lecturer influences this process.

Category E: Teaching as interacting and getting involved with students as a means of helping them to develop their own understanding of their introductory subjects

Category F: Teaching as developing the conditions in which students can become independent and begin to develop as responsible human beings

Each category is described in more detail below, with a brief illustration of key aspects of the categories through verbatim quotations. It is impossible for such brief quotations to illustrate all aspects of the category described, but I hope that they provide a concrete sense of the nature of the category which would be impossible from an abstract description alone.

The abbreviation of each course, together with the given pseudonym, will be used to identify the subjects for which the lecturers were interviewed. A summary of all the categories is given in Appendix III.

*6.4.1 **Category A:** Teaching as providing and transmitting subject knowledge*

This was the most common conception of all and was held by all the lecturers. In this category, teaching primarily means passing over information to students. Teaching is identified as transferring, transmitting, giving out and passing the initial subject knowledge to students. Emphasis is placed on the lecturer and the content, and the students are to a degree, somewhere in the background.

> Transferring of knowledge that is the aim of teaching: that is the acquisition of knowledge and skills…the basic knowledge of the subject, not to be an expert of it just the basic knowledge, (Kate, MGT 101)

Thus, the aim of teaching the introductory Business courses is to transmit the basic subject knowledge and skills to students, and to prepare them for the more advanced courses that will follow. For example, the purpose in the Accounting course is to transmit the basic principles of Accounting.

> This course is important because it is an introductory course and doesn't require any prior knowledge in Accounting and it is very important for the lecturer to teach the students right from the beginning about accountancy. This course is the students' first step in accountancy. Most of the students in Accounting 101 are new students to the college, they just came, and it is one of the first subjects that they have taken (Mary, ACC 101)

For the reasons given above, transferring knowledge to first year students is seen by many as a real challenge, especially for the Economics lecturer:

> I am dealing with people who are studying for the first time and to make students understand Economics is a real challenge. It is important that experienced teachers teach introductory courses because you will be able to make students love and like the course. And if they like it, they will like it forever. If they hate the course they will hate it for ever (James, ECO 101)

In their effort to transmit knowledge to students successfully, lecturers sought to make their lessons interesting and entertaining by using jokes and other means of amusement, as Anton and James explain.

> I always use jokes and make a good atmosphere (Anton, MAR 101)

> You cannot have a class without jokes. I know lots of jokes. You know one day another teacher was passing by and she asked me why people were laughing in your class? I told her that I had just told them funny stories and that is why. (James, ECO 101).

Transmitting knowledge includes the covering of the course syllabus and meeting exam requirements. Some lecturers even voiced their concern of not being able to cover the syllabus adequately and at the same time allow students to absorb the subject information.

> I am not prepared to cover 12 chapters because of the syllabus. I am prepared to cover eight and cover them well. It is wrong just to achieve a target without taking into consideration how much the students are learning (Anton, MAR 101).

The skill and the ability to transmit knowledge were considered to be especially important at the introductory courses and many lecturers stressed the importance of teacher training programmes to be made available to them.

> So it would be helpful for me to attend such training courses. A course that would help teachers who are starting now would be to teach them 'the art of teaching', because teaching is an art, an art combining very many ways that has to do with the character of the instructor, the material and the rapport with the students - you have to combine all these … It may be helpful to write a handbook of teaching tips for new-comers (Anton, MAR 101).

Summary

In summing up this category, it can be seen that these conceptions are based on the view that teaching is a process of transmitting knowledge which is to be conveyed to students by the lecturer. This category assumes that knowledge is solid and transferable, and the content of teaching is very much predetermined by the course syllabus. The lecturer is seen as both the presenter and the processor of knowledge. For this reason, it is important for the lecturer to maintain students' attention by making the subject interesting and entertaining. This is the reason why many lecturers see teaching training as vital in enhancing their job. The student at this stage is seen as an obedient beneficiary of knowledge. The activity of

teaching within this category is seen as lecturer-oriented and very much subject-focused, where the most important aspect was the transmission of the subject knowledge.

6.4.2. ***Category B:*** *Teaching as presenting the information so that the students can obtain the concepts of the introductory subjects*

As in the previous category, Category B sees knowledge as concrete and something that can be measured in terms of exams and syllabus coverage. As in Category A, the process of teaching remains, mainly, the transmission of knowledge. However, here emphasis is placed on *how* this knowledge is transmitted to the students. Lecturers recognising the difficulties faced by their students, whose first language is not English, place an enormous importance on how information is explained and presented. The Business Studies lecturers identified a variety of methods they used, such as: demonstrating the subject by using real-life examples, using simple explanations, illustrating material through slides, projectors and boards, and giving out handouts. Lecturers consider the latter as the most significant method of teaching. They are especially concerned that their students have enough written information regarding the course content.

Indeed, all of the lecturers interviewed said that they gave out written notes in the form of manuals or handouts using simple words and explanations. The importance of arranging the material in a logical manner is recognised as a need to simplify material so that it can be understood by the student. This process resembles Fox's interpretation of a baby food manufacturing analogy: 'the teacher sees his job as one of processing very tough material into more easily digestible nutrient for rather simple minds' (Fox , 1983: 153). Mary, teaching Accounting, states:

> We use the book for questions and homework, but we rely mostly on the notes. They don't understand the book. The times I have tried to do the course without giving notes it was impossible. Even those students who read the book said they have spent a lot of time studying the book without understanding anything… I give them the ready notes. (Mary, ACC 101)

For some of the courses, as in Introduction to Economics, it is seen as essential that illustrations are put on the board.

> The board for me is very important. I have to start from the beginning with the introductory courses, so I use the board a lot. In Economics you need to illustrate a lot of the concepts, and the only way is the board. (James, ECO).

Using real-life examples is considered very important at this stage. Again, the problem of language is stressed. For many lecturers, this constitutes a real constraint to their teaching, as James and Anton explain:

> The level of language is the biggest constraint. I cannot, for example, use complicated examples or words. Most of the books are American books, they have American examples. So I have to use local examples to illustrate a point like, AHK. Sometimes when you want to give examples and you are so excited, then nobody understands. When you want to talk about cauliflower you have to explain in Greek what it is (James, ECO 101).

> I use advertising clips and some funny advertisements to show how promotion is done, and how the companies are promoting their products, and always show them examples. Examples make it more interesting (Anton, MAR 101)

Summary

This category, like the previous one, is very much subject-and lecturer-oriented. The main aim of teaching is for students to be able to acquire the content of their subjects in a written form. It acknowledges the fact that lecturers see teaching as directed by external forces

such as exams and course syllabus requirements, and it is their responsibility to convey the contents to the students in a comprehensible way. As in Category A, the lecturers' main concern is to transfer knowledge and for the students to receive it in a structured and concrete manner. Having a record, therefore, of what is being taught is considered vital for the students and lecturers alike.

6.4.3 ***Category C:*** *Teaching as helping students to learn (and understand) their introductory subjects through practical participation and assessment.*

In this category, the lecturer assumes that students should be actively involved in learning their subjects. Teaching is seen as assisting students to obtain and apply the knowledge of their subject. The lecturer initiates the learning activities in which students will be engaged in demonstrating their knowledge and understanding of the subject. Although the focus has changed, from just acquiring knowledge to that of learning and understanding, this category is also seen as subject-oriented. As in previous categories, here too the lecturer is preoccupied with the transmission of knowledge. It involves the lecturer in directing the learning process, with students as participants. However, the concern here is to test the level of the students' understanding of the subject through quizzes, exams, assignments, written projects and constant questioning. Thus, the focus of this conception is on learning the subject through student involvement and assessment.

> At the end of the topic we always have a quiz. We have a quiz for all the chapters for all my courses I teach. So I know what they have understood and what they have not understood. When I am marking the quiz I always make comments so they know where they have gone wrong and why? (Mary, ACC 101)

> I have what is known as CAT, - continuous assessment test. This means I always ask questions in the class, give them quizzes and mid-terms. I

> tell the students who always answer my questions that this is an indication that he or she reads (James, ECO 101).

For the Marketing lecturer, giving assignments is one way of involving students and developing their understanding of the subject.

> I always ask them to do an assignment that would not be required from them to read text books - an assignment where they will have to be creative and exercise their critical judgement and apply the theory to practice. Some of the students cope with it and some cannot… They should learn from the beginning how to read how to understand, how to criticise, how to view things, how to comment on, and if they learn how to do these from the early steps, it means that they would do well in the later courses (Anton, MAR 101).

Both the Economics and Accounting lecturers share the same beliefs regarding assessment.

> I give them little papers or projects. They have to go to the street. For example, I ask them to go to Lydras Street and ask five shopkeepers what they have in common and where they are different. For example, they may discover that the price is the same or differs. Through this, they come to know terms like oligopoly, or monopoly. I ask them to go to petrol stations and restaurants and discover things for themselves (James, ECO 101).

> I always ask them if they understand and if they have any questions. I also give them exercises in class and I work round the class to see if they are doing it, and the next time I give them a small exercise for homework. So we go over the homework and the 3rd lecture I will give them a quiz (Mary, ACC 101).

Summary

Descriptions of teaching in this category frequently included aspects of Categories A and B, but in an expanded form and their focus has shifted towards helping students to start to understand the concepts rather than just acquiring them. Widening students' understanding at the introductory stage seemed difficult to many lecturers due to the inexperience of the students and their poor level of English. The focus still remains on students achieving the

skills and understanding as required by their lecturers (Boulton-Lewis, Smith, McCrindle, Burnett and Campbell, 2001).

Experiences related to this category were described mostly in relation to assignments, quizzes and exams. Lecturers' descriptions usually included a strong focus on designing knowledge in ways which would encourage students to learn and eventually understand the subject. Thus, putting theory into practice through active participation was an implication of Category C. Although the focus is slightly shifted from the measurable attainment of the subject knowledge, to that of the students' understanding of the subject, the nature of the category is still seen as lecturer-oriented. The guidance of the lecturer is still required, and as Dall'Alba stated, it is 'as the student needs to learn how to perform like the master' (1991: 295).

6.4.4 ***Category D:*** *Teaching as the development of the students into professional, 'orderly (well)-behaved' human beings and how the role of the lecturer contributes to this process*

Within this category, some lecturers highlighted the embedded influences they can have on student behaviour. Thus, many lecturers saw the purpose of teaching as the development of students into professional, 'orderly-behaved' human beings. Therefore, the role of the lecturer is seen as projecting an image of professionalism by setting a good example. Part of this role is to understand students and generally promote and support a good relationship with them.

> The outcome of learning is to help and facilitate the development of the new scientists who would be proper individuals in terms of good behaviour and manners, (Anton, MAR 101).

Teaching aims at facilitating changes in students' overall conduct and behaviour. For some lecturers, this means showing respect for both lecturers and students alike, and generally posing as a role model for students to follow. From this point of view, teaching aims at building the character of the student.

> I think is very important for the students to be able to respect their lecturers and the lecturer to put forward an image that encourages students to follow - in becoming professionals , and so the lecturer should be a role model for the students. The role model means behaving in a certain way and to understand when they go to work, they have to be professionals. The lecturer in the class proclaims an image of professionalism and correct conduct. (Mary, ACC 101).

> I try to gain from my students their respect through the knowledge and the way I tread and behave with them, so that they can pay that back. In the early years, I have seen that I have lost respect from students and I even have discipline problems. In my early years, it was due to the fact that I tried in a more autocratic way to have discipline in my class …You have to use the human approach, that is be human with people and to gain their respect (Elias, MGT 101).

Teaching also means establishing professionalism so that students begin to think and behave as professionals.

> They will have to be facilitators and professionals and have to be fair….To be professional is part of your job and this should pass to the students (Anton, MAR 101).

All lecturers maintained that having friendly relationships with their students facilitates the transformation of knowledge and the general process of learning, even though some insisted on having a barrier between them and their students, as an indication of respect.

> The lecturer should be very friendly to the students but keep a reasonable distance between lecturer and student. That is how you get their respect. A friendship that does not keep a gap between student and lecturer will not be very effective. (Mary, ACC 101).

Summary

In this category, the role of the lecturer plays an important part in supporting the transaction of certain values in terms of professionalism and behaviour. The underlying aim is the understanding of the subject and how it relates to the practice of the chosen discipline/profession. The lecturers are responsible for passing on the idea of professionalism. In this sense, they may be considered as role models in the development of their students' character. The establishment of good and friendly relationships with the students is also seen as part of good teaching.

At this point, the lecturer begins to involve students in building their own concepts of the subject and for the students to start thinking as professionals and as active participants in the acquisition of knowledge. However, as commented on by some lecturers, students still find it difficult to completely comprehend the importance of starting to think for themselves.

6.4.5 ***Category E:*** *Teaching as interacting and getting involved with students, helping them to develop their own understanding of the subject*

This category, whilst involving elements of the previous category, aims to widen the understanding and involvement of students through active participation in real-life exercises. Teaching means interacting with students through questioning, teamwork and discussions. The students are encouraged to voice their own opinions and begin to work in teams. Teaching may also be described as helping students to develop their own critical thinking. In this sense, the students are expected to be active and start forming their own opinions about knowledge. This category is different from previous categories in that the

participation and involvement of the student in the process of learning is required. It focuses on both the lecturer and the student in the process of working together to construct personal meaning.

> You group them together so they can begin to work as a team. This is the most important thing to work in a team… It's good to team weak students with strong students - they learn from each other. There were students who were not able to talk and after putting them into groups they started asking questions (James, ECO 101).

> Sometimes if the students have some questions, this might lead to a discussion. I try to make them talk by discussing interesting topics like sexual harassment. This way they get to know other students in the class. Quite interesting, I am pleasantly surprised sometimes (Kate, ACC 101*)*.

Summary

The aim of teaching within this category is to help students to be actively involved in learning through participation and involvement. Lecturers create learning situations in which students are able to enhance and develop their own opinions and further their prior understanding. The aim is to help students make sense of new material in the context of what they have already learned, and generally begin making sense of the world around them. Lecturers tend to see themselves as resources, guiders or facilitators which students can draw on. In this process, focus moves away from the lecturer towards the student. The role of the lecturer shifts towards that of helping the student to learn, and away from the mere transmission of subject knowledge. The emphasis is on student learning outcomes rather than upon defining content.

6.4.6 ***Category F:*** *Teaching as developing the conditions in which students can become independent and begin to develop as responsible human beings*

The aim of teaching here is seen as a process of helping students to become independent learners and to begin to develop as responsible human beings. In this category, teaching is seen as focusing on facilitating students to develop their own independent thinking. It is important that this process begins from the introductory course level.

> They should learn from the beginning how to read, how to understand, how to criticise, how to view things, how to comment on, and if they learn how to do these from the early steps, it means that they would do well in the later courses (Anton, MAR 10.)

It is clear that the intention of the lecturers is to gradually begin to develop their students' autonomous thinking by encouraging their intellectual development.

> Why make the student understand and become more critical? Because if they become more critical, we will have a better world…University is very important - is to make students become more critical. This will make people to be more democratic (James, ECO 101).

The lecturer is seen as a facilitator in the students' learning and students are not just receivers of knowledge but also participants in learning. This category entails the importance of self as students begin to think for themselves becoming responsible human beings. This category is expressed by all the lecturers interviewed.

> If you have knowledge you behave responsibly - Responsibly towards the society, responsibly towards the environment, responsibly towards their job, towards their employer, responsibly towards themselves. Knowledge will help them to develop responsibility. To a certain extent, we are helping them to do that (Anton, MAR 101).

> They should be more knowledgeable of how they think, also how they face problems also how they put themselves forward and how they behave. It is to develop people who can think for themselves. Education should make a difference in students' thinking. They should be able to make judgements, to behave professionally and to be able to solve problems (Mary, ACC 101).
>
> And then working and sharpening their mind in asking why and also the fact that you contribute to someone becoming better citizens…I think in their life, they will have live it with dignity, integrity and mastering of details so that they can have competitive advantage (Elias, MGT 101).

Summary

Category F maintains that teaching is about facilitating students' development into responsible people capable of thinking for themselves. It is important that students are not just obedient receivers of information but begin to develop intellectually. Although, this category at a glance might seem similar to Category E, it does differ in many ways. Here, more emphasis is placed on what is happening to the students themselves rather than on the subject per se. They are recognised as individuals rather than as an audience to be lectured (Kember, 1997). In other words, teaching is seen as fostering personal development. It is about making it possible for the students to grow as people. It includes equipping students with social competence as well as subject knowledge.

This process involves the lecturer providing the stimulus and then 'apparently fading into the background for students to take action in extending themselves "cognitively". Goals in this category tend to be 'broader and less subject-oriented with emphasis on the growth of the student as a whole person' (Boulton-Lewis et al., 2001: 41).

However, it is important to note here, that, although lecturers talked extensively of the importance of the self-development of their students, most of them admitted the difficulty of putting this into practice. Similarly, Samuelowicz and Bain (1992) acknowledged that most lecturers do not reach high standards of teaching at undergraduate level. In fact, they found the lecturers' conception of 'supporting student learning' only in the context of postgraduate teaching. Indeed, many of the lecturers interviewed confirmed that changing students' conceptions in the introductory courses is an extremely complex process. Anton stated that the immaturity of students together with their low academic standards when they enter college, makes this process extremely difficult.

> We do have a problem with the culture of the college too. I would say the type of students we attract here. Some of the students we attract here are very low academically,…may be 40% of the students even though they just memorise, they are not exercising their critical mind. What's more, I don't see how we can start developing them into independent human beings. They are just too immature at this stage (Anton, MAR 101).

In Chapter 11, the above findings are explained and discussed further.

CHAPTER 7

Data Analysis and Presentation of Findings

STUDENTS' CONCEPTIONS OF LEARNING

7.2 Introduction

This chapter describes and analyses the categories of the students' conceptions of learning in their introductory Business subjects. The emphasis of the analysis was on exploring aspects of learning in their broader sense. It was conducted with the aim of identifying and presenting broad categories of description. For the convenience of the reader, the chapter is divided into two sections: forming the categories of learning, and presenting the data of the students' conceptions of learning. As I will start referring to the students in the subsequent sections, it is a good idea to first introduce them. As with the lecturers, pseudonyms have been used so that the identity of the students is not disclosed.

7.2 Introducing the Students

I decided early on to interview the students first and then the lecturers. I needed to interview students before the end of the semester, as once they finish their courses, it is difficult to locate them. I started interviewing them at the beginning of the Spring semester of 2005 and completed all interviews before the end of the semester in May 2005. All the students interviewed had already taken or were taking one of the Introductory Business courses that were involved in this research study. This section briefly names the twelve students who took part, but more detailed information is provided in Appendix II.

Al, together with An (Anton) and Yianna were the first to be interviewed for the Introduction to Management course. They were followed by Geo, Mary and Sylvana for the Introduction to Marketing and Nick together with Kate, Gaby and Demis were interviewed for the Introduction to Accounting. Theo and Sue took part in the Introduction to Economics course.

7.3 Forming Categories of Conceptions of Learning

In forming the categories of students' conceptions, I primarily adopted the same principles as in the conceptions of teaching. Thus, the final stage of the analysis focused on the identification of both the common and distinctive ways of experiencing the learning of Business subjects across the students as a group (Lucas, 2000). The process of developing learning categories involved the following:

- The variation in how a certain phenomenon is conceived or experienced by the students.
- The relations between the categories of the students' conceptions of learning.
- The hierarchy formed within the categories.

Six categories of student conceptions of learning were revealed as follows:

Category A: Learning is receiving subject knowledge

Category B: Learning is receiving knowledge through methods that will enable students to understand the concepts of their introductory subjects.

Category C: Learning is studying and memorising the knowledge with the aim of reproducing it when and if required

Category D: Learning is the process of facilitating and conveying knowledge through the role of the lecturer

Category E: Learning is being exposed to activities that generate the understanding of the subject knowledge

Category F: Learning is about using Business concepts in order to change students' views and to change them as people in general.

7.4 Presenting the Students' Conceptions of Learning

This section outlines the data findings of the interviews collected from the students. It aims to reveal their conceptions and experiences of learning. Characteristics of the students' conceptions are outlined in a set of six categories of descriptions. These categories demonstrated the conceptions of learning which the students held in the initial stages of their studies. Students appeared to possess a variety of different conceptions in how they saw their respective courses. Each category is illustrated with quotation from the data. The different relations between these categories are discussed in greater depth in Chapter 9. Appendix III summarises the conceptions of learning categories as elicited from the data.

*7.4.1 **Category A:** Receiving subject knowledge*

Receiving knowledge is considered by the students as a very important part, if not the most important component of learning. In acquiring knowledge, students expected their lecturers to be knowledgeable about their subject, entertaining and most importantly, capable of transmitting knowledge in a simplified manner.

This conception refers mainly to the accumulation or absorption of subject knowledge and it was voiced by nearly all the students. The following comments made by Demis, Al, Yianna and Theo, represent a small sample of this view.

> Therefore it is very important that you leave college with a lot of knowledge (Demis, ACC 101).
>
> And you get some knowledge that will help you in the future. The aim of learning is I think getting knowledge (Al, MGT 101).
>
> I think it is the theory (knowledge) – every course has a theory and you learn the theory and then you exercise and practice until you have to understand the theory and if you don't understand it you go home and practice again (Yianna , MGT 101).
>
> I think the main aim of learning is knowledge and getting knowledge which means to understand the subject well. This will help you to become a professional at your job (Theo, ECO 101).

The students frequently referred to their dependency on the lecturers for the attainment of this knowledge. This was expressed by several students who insisted that a lecturer must be well prepared, know the content of their subject well and like teaching. For example, Gaby, and Theo stated that:

> A good teacher is a person that gives the idea that she knows what she is doing - she is doing this because she likes it and not because of the money and that she is interested to see if students understand the lesson. (Gaby, ACC 101)
>
> Somebody who is not too rushed and to make students feel that he is pleased to do this, and that he likes what he is doing (Theo, ECO 101.)

In a similar vein, Nick, who also studied Accounting explained:

> First of all, the lecturers must like what they are doing, if a lecturer likes his lessons we can sense it. Another important thing is that a lecturer must always be prepared. If he comes to class with notes and

> visual aids and when you ask questions he answers immediately and then you feel that he or she is prepared (Nick, ACC 101).

Over and over again, students expressed their difficulty in understanding the material, which is taught in English. In fact, the majority of the students reported on this. In particular, they emphasised the importance of the lecturer having the ability to illustrate the subject using plain language. Students expected lecturers to have the skills to transfer information in ways they could understand. Theo, a mature student studying Economics, summarised this in the following quotation:

> The lecturer must transfer the information to the students in the easiest way and make it understandable - to have the skills to transfer information. To use the right language and not to make students feel anxious about receiving the information. To use plain language and not to be too relaxed about it (Theo, ECO 101).

Geo and Mary studying Marketing expressed the same view:

> First of all to make the students understand what the lecture is all about and to understand students. He has to be prepared so that he can do his job professionally (Geo, MAR 101).

> The role of the lecturer is to be a good lecturer - that is to be able to transfer the knowledge in a simple and understanding manner (Mary, MAR 101).

In receiving information at the introductory stages, several of the students stressed that it was important that lecturers make the lesson interesting. For instance, Demis and An stated the following:

> Firstly, they should be able to make their classes exciting and to be patient because some students get lost in the class…. A lecturer that makes you enthusiastic about the course, makes you want to learn, makes you want to study (Demis, ACC 101).

> He should always try hard to make the lesson interesting so that he attracts the majority of students in the classroom. And because the student is learning something new every day, this is tiring and so the teachers should also understand the students (An, MGT 101).

Many students commented that the personality of the lecturer is very often reflected in his or her ability to convey the subject to students successfully. An summarised this in the following statement:

> To have a pleasant personality and to make you interested in the lesson. The aim is not for you to just get a degree, but also to understand certain things. He must be able to deliver the subject. To care about the students. The grade of the student is the result of the combined efforts of the teacher and student together. If I get a D in a course it is not only me that failed but in someway the teacher is responsible too. If I try very hard then the teacher should try hard to help as well so we can reach our goal (An, MGT 101).

Very often this meant, as Al and Geo explained, the use of jokes by the lecturers to break up the monotony of the lesson.

> To make jokes, and to be friendly with the students, to know their material and to know what s/he teaches (Al, MGT 101).

> One particular lecturer was breaking the lesson with a small interval and was cracking a few jokes – and that was good. He also told us that if we were OK with him he would be OK with us too (Geo, MAR 101).

Summary

This conception is quantitative in nature. It refers to subject knowledge as concrete, as something solid which can be accumulated and measured. Students in this study, frequently referred to the 'gathering of theory', information and knowledge as one of the most important part of learning. The focus was on acquiring rules and principles of the subject in question, (Pillay and Boulton-Lewis, 2000). They saw themselves as the passive receivers of this knowledge, as they expected their lecturers to be experts in the subjects they taught.

The students saw the skill of the lecturers in transferring information as very important at this stage. At the same time, they expected them to be able to make the lesson interesting, comprehensible and entertaining. Sylvana summarised clearly the essence of this category:

> The expected outcome of learning is to develop people who are professional and have a lot of knowledge. So the outcome of learning is getting knowledge (Sylvana, MAR 101).

7.4.2 ***Category B:*** *Learning means receiving information through methods that will enable the students to understand the concepts of their introductory subjects.*

As in Category A, in this category students perceive learning as receiving subject knowledge. However, here, students emphasised the importance of receiving information in a clear, structured and easy-to-understand manner. They identified these methods as: well-prepared notes, well-illustrated slides, and the use of real-life examples to illustrate material. Learning in this category takes place when well-structured facts, concepts, and rules of action are passively received 'from a more knowledgeable source [teacher, textbook] to the waiting container [student]' (McGuinnes, 2005: 35). Again, the students' dependency on the lecturer for attaining knowledge is apparent in this category. As in Category A, the process of learning is mainly the transmission of knowledge through easy and well-illustrated channels. The students' dependency on the lecturer for knowledge is well illustrated here by Geo:

> He ought to be able to teach me to be orderly and consistent with my work. To be able to think and understand my actions and not just to do them mechanically. This is what the role of the lecturer is, to make students work consistently and correctly (Geo, MAR 101).

The majority of students, with the exception of two, stressed the importance of lecturers providing clear, easily understood explicable notes which simplify the information. In fact, many of them have suggested that there is no need to buy the course book if the notes were available. This is well-expressed by Al, Sylvana and Nick.

> Notes are the most important aspect. There is the book of course but there are students who do not understand the book. They want the information written in simple English so that they are able to understand it. There are people who without notes will not be able to complete the course (Al, MGT 101).

> I found when professors give notes it is easier for us to study. For example if I have the book and the notes from the professor the notes are very clear and easily understood. The only thing I do is when he finishes the lecture I use his notes and I also read my notes and understand what they saying (Sylvana, MAR 101).

> Handouts will be a good idea, they are very useful – it will show the meaning of the course. If you study the handouts and only handouts, you can pass the course. If you want a better grade, then you can study from the book (Nick, ACC 101).

In fact, many of the students like Sue, Al and An, stressed how much they disliked it when the lecturer talked too much or too fast and failed to give clear notes. They assumed that any additional information expressed by the lecturer, but not included in the notes, was a complete waste of time.

> When the teacher talks too fast and you are unable to write down any notes. Also the language, but this is no problem for me (Al, MGT 101.)

> I don't like teachers who talk a lot about nothing. They should concentrate on the main concepts (Sue, ECO 101).

> When the teacher uses monologues, when the teacher uses slides with too many explanations and talks at the same time and we can not copy the slides and listen at the same time. You need to take good notes in the classroom, otherwise how would you remember what we have covered in class? (An, MGT 101).

Within this context, 'course textbooks assumed less importance and direct learning materials (notes) and handouts assumed greater importance' (Lucas, 2000: 488), as illustrated here by An.

> I do not read the recommended book, I rely on the teachers' notes only. Because he is not going to be examining us on something that he did not say in class (An, MGT 101).

The majority of students also specified their preference for slides and the use of the board as a means of presenting the material, because visualising the information aids learning. Geo and Sue demonstrated this in the following comments:

> Some teachers are very good but others are not so good. They are good because they use slides and they go at a slow pace so that you can take notes. The ones that are not so good are the ones who talk and talk and do not use the board or slides and we are expected to take notes as they speak and that is difficult (Geo, MAR 101).

> I think there are two methods I like. One is to give us handouts of the course because it is more important for me to go home and study again. One other method I like in the International Business course is that the teacher uses slides – then he gives us the handouts – the handouts are brief… Notes however are very important. For example, one of the books in one of the subjects that I have right now is very difficult to understand and if the teacher did not give us any notes, I would be really lost (Sue, ECO 101).

Students also maintained that the use of real-life examples, in illustrating and explaining information, was part of learning the subject knowledge. This is clearly explained by Theo and Geo:

> For example, in the Marketing lesson, I don't really remember the information but I remember the examples and it can help me remember and understand the topic (Theo, ECO 101).

> Real examples are very important, because it deals with your life so you can relate to it (Geo, MAR 101).

Summary

Once again, the students emphasised their reliance on the lecturer to provide them with the subject knowledge using well-structured methods. In particular, the students indicated their preference for well-prepared notes, well-illustrated slides and the use of real-life examples. As in the previous category, learning is perceived as receiving knowledge, and this is clearly the responsibility of the lecturer.

*7.4.3 **Category C:** Learning is studying and memorising the knowledge with the aim of reproducing it when and if required*

For many students, learning means the memorisation of knowledge and the ability to reproduce it in such forms as quizzes and exams. Memorisation is often associated with studying. This is clearly evident in the initial Business courses. Almost all the students in this research related the process of memorising to that of studying. Importance is placed on the key points stressed by their lecturer. Again, as in the previous category, the students see knowledge as the sole responsibility of the lecturer. The students' duty is seen as merely to remember and study it.

Students very often demonstrated their concern about the amount of material taught and how much of it they would be able to remember. In their efforts to memorise and recall knowledge, many students devised their own methods of studying. For example, a number of them stressed the importance of writing, rewriting, typing and reading over their notes several times.

> I have problems remembering words and terms and names so I write them and type them slowly. When I type something slowly, I understand it and remember it. When I finish typing, I remember the information. I type the notes that I think I will not remember (Kate, ACC 101).
>
> First I go home and rewrite the notes clearly and then I learn the notes. I don't usually read from the book, I rely on the notes. I try to understand them and then I memorise them (Geo, MAR 101).
>
> I write everything down three or four times, and I learn them…it is amazing how many hours I spend doing this. (do you think is important to understand something or to memorise it?). It is important to first understand it, and for me, it is important to first memorise it in order to be able to sit for the exam (Sylvana, MAR 101).

Students at this stage are very concerned about being able to reproduce knowledge in terms of quizzes and exams. In fact, students often see this as the main incentive to study. An, Kate and Sue expressed this view in the following quotations:

> The quiz enables students to learn and to get an idea of what they are capable of before the mid term or final exam? (An, MGT 101).
>
> They control the students to study. For example, some students don't study. They study a few days before the mid term and a few days before the final exam. The quizzes 'switch me' on. I know I have to read everything and I will remember everything. I think we should do more quizzes more often, even small ones help (Kate, ACC 101).
>
> Sometimes, if we don't have exams, none of the students will do any revision. Yes, exams help you to understand (Sue, ECO 101).

Students saw passing exams, getting good grades and qualifications as a means to an end. The following comments were typical of the interview group:

> Learning is to get an A in college. And in life to get the job that you want, to be a professional, and to feel that you are mastering your job. College will help me with this objective (Sue, ECO 101).
>
> I think the college purpose is to pass the course and get a degree. Learning more is always good but it may not be your main purpose

> sometimes. Exercises make you think. For that particular course, there were no assignments (Nick, ACC 101).
>
> The most important thing you get from education is the qualifications. This is the most important outcome (Yianna , MGT 101).

Summary

Within this category, learning is remembering and recalling knowledge. Studying means primarily memorising a subject to pass exams and consequently obtain good grades. The need to pass exams was more important than understanding the subject. Again, as in previous categories, the students saw the lecturer as the initiator of knowledge.

7.4.4 ***Category D:*** *Learning is the process of facilitating and conveying knowledge through the role of the lecturer*

Category D is different from the previous categories in that it emphasises the role of the lecturer in conveying knowledge. Students here perceive the role of the lecturer in the classroom as an important component in the acquisition of knowledge. Within this category, many of the students interviewed maintained that the lecturers' attitude and behaviour influenced their own learning in general. A great number of them stressed the impact the lecturer has on their own development. Some considered their lecturers as role models.

According to students, lecturers have the responsibility and ability to mould students' characters through their own behaviour and personality. This is very important especially for students who are just starting their studies. As one student put it: 'the teacher is the mirror – we should be able to learn from how he behaves' (Geo, MAR 101).

Kate, Nick, An and Gaby expressed the same opinion:

> Because when we are young, the first people children see is their teacher, they have to give a good example. I like strict teachers because I am strict with myself (Kate, ACC 101).

> The role of the lecturer is to be a role model of good behaviour and to promote professionalism. For example, if you see the teacher smoking outside or coming in the classroom smelling of alcohol, this is not a very good picture (Nick, ACC 101).

> I think a lecturer should be a role model for their students and to act in a good manner and to be good at his job. In other words to act professionally. If a teacher does not behave properly, then he is a bad model for the students. The teacher should not think that he is above the students (An, MGT 101).

> I think the role of the lecturer is really to be a role model –in other words he or she has to behave in a responsible manner, and in a business-like manner. He or she has to show a good example for the students that means dressing appropriately and behaving appropriately (Gaby, ACC 101).

Another important point expressed by the students repeatedly, was the seeming 'obligation' of the lecturers to build good and even friendly relationships with them. This often implied understanding and respecting them as people. This was voiced by almost all students. Only a small example is indicated here.

> To respect the students - to realise that even students who do not do well, their personality counts (Kate, ACC 101).

> And he must be able to gain the respect of their students. Lecturers with their ways should be able to do that – I mean gain the respect of their students (Geo, MAR 101).

> Sometimes the teacher must act like a friend because students may come closer to them. If the students find the lecturer attractive he will concentrate (on the course), if not he will not concentrate. To be like a parent sometimes (Nick, ACC 101.)

> See the role of the lecturers as to understand students, this is their main role in my opinion (Mary, MAR 101).

For many students, the lecturer's personality played an important part in learning. For some of them, it even influenced the choice of courses they made.

> With the teachers who I had a good relationship with, I took lessons with them again. Those who I did not have a good relationship, I did not take any more lessons with them again (Geo, MAR 101).

.

Mary, saw the importance of being able to ask questions in the class as very significant in the process of learning. An, on the other hand, saw the value of being able to voice one's opinion and engage in discussions as equally important.

> Not to be so open with the students – just friendly so that students can feel able to ask questions. Not to be afraid of him. Give examples and try and make conversation (Mary, MAR 101).

> First of all I have a good relationship with my lecturers especially now …It is important to have friendly relationships with your teacher so the teacher may understand you better (An, MGT 101).

Interestingly however, there were two students who actually believed that the lecturer should keep a barrier between themselves and their students. This is what Al had to say:

> A good lecturer should be near his students but to also have distance. There should be respect between students and lecturers... Students should be able to speak freely. Lecturers should not bring with them their own personal problems during the lecture, and should not reflect their own problems on the students (Al, MGT101).

Finally, an overwhelming number of students commented on the physical appearance and the tone of a lecturer's voice as essential factors in successfully conveying the subject information. For Sue and Gaby, the actual dress of the lecturer was considered important, whilst Sylvana thought that the tone of the lecturer was equally vital.

Summary

In this category, the role of the lecturer is important in conveying knowledge. According to students, lecturers have an important role to play in the classroom. They have to act professionally in the way they speak, behave, dress and understand students. In particular, they should build good and friendly relationships between themselves and their students. Again, this category is very much lecturer-oriented, where the students view the lecturers as transmitters of knowledge and as professionals.

7.4.5 ***Category E:*** *Learning means being exposed to activities which generate the understanding of the subject knowledge*

This category indicates a shift from passive to active learning. In all the previous categories, students depended on the lecturer and what s/he had to say. The students played a passive role in the process of learning. Learning in this category signifies interacting and actively participating through such activities as teamwork and discussions. Learning in this sense may be described as helping students to develop their own critical thinking in understanding the concepts of their subjects. The aim is to broaden their understanding through student involvement and participation. Most of the students interviewed emphasised the importance of being involved in groups. Some of the responses are identified below:

> Doing something in groups also helps you to learn because of communication. The teamwork is also important. If the teacher gives you a project first of all we have to understand it and then we have to practise (Yianna , MGT 101).

> Discussions I think are the best because when you listen to the opinions of others you understand better, because they are in the same position as you (Al, MGT101).
>
> I think group work is important. Because somehow, apart from learning to work with others, the others may have different characteristics and ideas and there is somehow some competition amongst the groups and we try to do our best (Gaby, ACC 101).

From the interviews, it also became clear, that the involvement of students in group discussions helped the 'weaker' ones to learn from the 'more able'. Being involved in discussions, according to Theo and Kate, helped them to discover meaning for themselves. It was possible for students to get a feeling of real-life situations.

> Discussions I think help a lot because of the setting we live in. If you use some Cypriot examples for discussion, students can get into the situation and you get the feeling of others people's opinions (Theo, ECO 101).

Summary

This category differs from previous categories. Students are beginning to shift from just obediently receiving knowledge to that of active contributors of knowledge. They are involved in discussions where they are able to share opinions and ideas and form their own understanding of the subject.

*7.4.6 **Category F:** Learning is about using business concepts in order to change students' views and to change them as people in general*

This is the most 'extensive' conception. Students focused on the changing quality of their own understanding of business and of the world at large. They began to see the general principles of business concepts as an intellectual means which can be used to help their understanding of many other areas. They believed that their study of Business courses will

help them to change the way they view the world, to think for themselves and to develop their career.

When asked what they thought the outcomes of learning were, a great number of them emphasised the importance of changing as people and becoming better human beings. Many of them viewed learning as being able to function in society and to survive in the real world.

> I think that learning only business definitions and terms is not important, the important thing is the way you think, the way you judge things and the way you see life. I think, yes, it changes you as a person and it is true what the people used to say in the olden days 'an uneducated person is like an uncrafted piece of wood' (Sylvana, MAR 101).
>
> I also think that learning makes you a better person – I mean someone who behaves well and acts with responsibility in society (Gaby, ACC 101).
>
> Learning anything is useful. The more you know the better, it makes you a better person. It develops the person. You are not going to use everything you learn but it makes you see things from different angles and from different ways. You are more open-minded and you can understand better (Demis, ACC 101).
>
> It helps us to deal with people in society and what goes on in society (Mary, MAR 101).
>
> We learn how life is and how people survive in real life and what goes on in the real world. Learning helps you to function in the real world (Al, MGT101).

One surprising element which came through the interviews was that, whilst education was seen as helping students' to become responsible human beings, they often linked this with finding a job and launching a career. This was reflected in nearly all of their responses. The following quotations form a small sample of this.

> I think it is to prepare us to be responsible human beings and able to think for ourselves. Also it is to prepare us for a career, in other words to prepare us to be professionals (Al, MGT 101). .
>
> First, to find a job and secondly, education makes you think (Nick, ACC 101).
>
> The first thing I think I am going to be more prepared if I am ever going to find a job. I will be very prepared. If I didn't do this course I think I would be too afraid to go and find a job (Sylvana, MAR 101).

7.5 Summary

The last category focuses on the growth of the student as a person through student-centred activities involving exploring, questioning and seeking for meaning. However, within this category, learning is still viewed as collecting knowledge for building a career.

Although this concept of learning is emphasised by many students, one is sceptical of how far students, still in the initial stages of their studies, actually understood its significance. What is clear, however, is that the students had begun to see learning as a continuous journey where understanding their Business courses and understanding knowledge in general has a part to play in their general development. Thus, there was a clear indication that students were beginning to shift their conceptions of learning from merely 'acquiring knowledge', to that of 'understanding knowledge'.

CHAPTER 8

Findings and Discussion

LECTURERS' CONCEPTIONS OF TEACHING

8.1 Introduction

The Findings and Discussion of this study is divided into three separate chapters. Chapter 8 focuses on discussing the findings of the lecturers' conceptions of teaching. Chapter 9 concentrates on the findings of the students' conceptions of learning, whilst Chapter 10 compares the findings of Chapters 8 and 9.

This chapter discusses and compares the research findings from the lecturers by exploring the relationships between the categories of conceptions of teaching. In Chapter 6, it was pointed out that the lecturers' conceptions fall into six categories. There was ample evidence to suggest that the lecturers in the Business courses tended to have dominant viewpoints. The data also showed that lecturers held multiple conceptions of teaching simultaneously. In fact, the data indicated that all of the participants held between two and three conceptions at the same time. No participant identified only one conception. It is worth noting here, that similar findings were found with the students' conceptions of learning.

8.2 Conceptions of Teaching - Discussion of the Findings

As with the students, the lecturers' conceptions are apparently linked in a hierarchical relationship (Akerlind, 2004). That is, the conceptions of teaching embodied by later categories include aspects of teaching represented by earlier categories - although the latter

may not form the primary part of the experience, they are often in the background. The categories also represent a sequence of increasing complexity in lecturers' understanding of the concept of teaching their specific subjects. It was apparent that the categories went through a series of understandings - starting from 'lower-level' to the middle and then 'higher-level' categories.

In particular, these conceptions could not be inclusive or independent of each other. In other words, having higher- level conceptions, as is the case with Categories E and F, does not necessarily mean that participants may not hold lower level conceptions such as Categories A, B and C. From this point of view, it is hard to identify the most important conceptions held by the lecturers of the undergraduate Business courses.

It is possible to summarise the conceptions of teaching under three levels of categories. The table below (Table 8.1) shows the three-set categorisation, which also takes into consideration the boundaries between these categories.

Table 8.1: Levels of Conceptions of Teaching

Lower- level Conceptions	***Subject Knowledge transmission***	***Teaching–oriented/lecturer-dependent***
	Presenting subject knowledge to students	
	Facilitating and monitoring knowledge	
Middle level	***The role of lecturer in the process of teaching***	***Lecturer - facilitated/ lecturer-dependent***
Higher- level Conceptions	***Developing students' own understanding of the subjects***	***Student-oriented/student -dependent***
	The self development of student as responsible human being	

The first set of categories is described as lower-level conceptions identified in this thesis as 'teaching–oriented/lecturer-dependent'**.** The third set is categorised as the higher-level conceptions, referred to as 'student-oriented/student-dependent'.

The boundary between each category within the sets shows a relatively straightforward progression. However, transitions *between* the sets are anticipated as indicating a more significant change.

A second, middle category, in which the role of lecturer and student interaction is recognised as important, is included as the transitional link between the lower and higher levels of conceptions as 'lecturer-facilitated/student-dependent'. The middle category acted as a go-between for the two levels of conceptions, emphasising the relationship between the students and lecturers.

In the lower-level categories, the lecturer concentrates on 'teaching' the subject by providing prepared information and making sure that knowledge is conveyed to the students. It follows that such activities may be termed as 'teaching-oriented'. At the same time, the students 'depend' on their lecturers for their expert knowledge so they are 'lecturer-dependent'. In the higher-level categories, the lecturer helps the students, through extensive interaction, to personalise their understanding of the subject, and at this level, the student is the centre of learning. These actions may be described as 'student-oriented'. At the same time, the students become responsible for their own learning- and depend on their own abilities - hence this activity may be described as 'student-dependent'.

The lower and higher level conceptions are similar to the `knowledge transmission' and the `learning facilitation' orientations identified by Gow and Kember (1993). The higher-level categories focus on the student's learning and therefore are progressing from lecturer-dependent knowledge to that of student-dependent knowledge. It depends on the student's own knowledge and learning rather than the lecturer's.

When placing lecturers in positions along the hierarchy, none was placed at either of the two extremes. For example, even the most student-oriented lecturer needed to deal with the practicalities of teaching such courses and this often made their task particularly difficult.

The table (Table 8.2) below illustrates an overview of the categories that are divided into the Orientations of Teaching and Activities of Teaching.

Table 8.2: Summary of the Conceptions of Teaching Categories: Orientation and Activity of Teaching

Category	Orientation of Teaching	Activities of Teaching
A	Teaching-oriented:	A lecturer-dependent activity that aims to transmit subject knowledge to the students. Students are dependent on their lecturers.
B	Teaching-oriented:	A lecturer-dependent activity with the intention of helping students received knowledge through various methods (tat is notes). Students are dependent on their lecturers.
C	Teaching–oriented:	A lecturer-dependent activity with the intention of monitoring students' knowledge (for example, quizzes). Students are dependent on their lecturers.
D	Lecturer –facilitated:	A lecturer-facilitated activity with the intention of promoting students' attitudes and professionalism. Students are still dependent on their lecturers.
E	Student- oriented:	A student-dependent activity with the intention of encouraging an expanded awareness of the discipline, through active student participation. Students begin to depend on their own abilities for acquiring knowledge.
F	Student- oriented.	A student-dependent activity with the intention of encouraging students' independence in learning and personal growth. Students depend on themselves for generating knowledge.

Categories A, B and C (see Table 8.2) indicated traditional thinking about teaching the four Business subjects, focusing mainly on the content of the subject. The focus is to convey knowledge that is 'quantifiable' - centred mainly on the requirements of the course. Consideration is given to the course syllabus and exam requirements. This is clearly illustrated by Elias and Mary, lecturers in Management and Accounting.

> Well, first of all in preparing a chapter, you have to have in mind the syllabus and in the syllabus, it states which the key points are. So this is one way to have an idea of what to concentrate on (Elias, MGT 101).
>
> At the end of this course the students should cover the whole syllabus. I expect all the students to be able to use their basic Accounting skills they acquired (Mary, ACC 101).

To summarise, these conceptions perceived teaching as dominated by external factors. The primary aim is that students acquire the lecturers' knowledge. The students, on the other hand, are seen as passive recipients of this knowledge and are totally dependent on their lecturers. In this sense, teaching may be termed as teaching-oriented and lecturer-dependent.

All five lecturers responded positively to categories A, B and C. In these categories, it was evident that their focus was solely on the content of their specific subject and was not related to the Business discipline as a whole. This was found across all subjects (Prosser et al., 2005). Remarkably, however, nearly all lecturers also perceived their subjects in a more integrated and holistic manner and showed how their subject is related to the Business field in general. This was shown in Categories E and F. According to Prosser, et al., (2005) this makes logical sense – in that lecturers, who show little or no understanding of how their specific subjects correlate with the discipline generally, are not likely to be in a position to

help their students understand these relationships. To help appreciate the responses, the following table indicates the lecturers' responses against each category.

Table 8. 3: Responses of lecturers in relation to each category

Categories	**No of Responses**	% of Total Responses	**No of lecturers**	% of Total lecturers
A	21	19%	5	100%
B	36	33%	5	100%
C	12	11%	4	80%
D	12	11%	4	80%
E	16	15%	5	100%
F	11	10%	4	80%
	109	100	5	

The first column of Table 8.3 indicates the six conceptions of teaching. The second column specifies the responses made by the lecturers for each category. The third column shows the percentage of responses for each category against the total number of responses. The fourth column shows the number of lecturers who responded for each category. The final column shows the percentage of the total number of lecturers. For example, four lecturers (that is, 80% of the total number) gave 12 responses, for Category C and D (that is 11% of the total responses). Because the sample is small, it is inappropriate to draw extensively on conclusions made from this statistical data. The above table only serves to provide a general picture of the lecturers' responses for each category and not to quantify the results.

As described above, most of the lecturers involved in this research responded positively to all the above categories. This implied that most of them held more than one conception of teaching, some of them in apparent conflict (Lingbiao and Watkins, 2001). These findings reflect to some extent previous research results.

For example, Kember and Gow (1994) found that many university lecturers responded positively to both the conception of teaching as `knowledge transmission' and as `learning facilitation'. The results of this study together with a number of previous studies provided evidence to support this view (Bowden, 1988; Larsson, 1983; Marton and Saljo, 1984; Pratt, 1992).

This supported Argyris's and Schon's (1978) argument that teachers might have two sets of personal theories: an 'espoused theory' and a 'theory-in-use'. Similarly, another group of researchers argued that 'teaching is a complex system processing in multiple ways and directions, - there are several parallel streams going down along the same slope' **(**Lingbiao and Watkins, 2002: 75).

Taking a closer look at the categories I can see that Category A is the most widely identified conception of teaching in the literature, even though it is expressed by different names. Examples include: `presenter of information' (Christensen, Massey, Isaacs, and Synott, 1995); `transmitting information' (Dall'Alba, 1990); `transfer theory' (Fox, 1983); `knowledge transmission' (Gow and Kember, 1993) presenting 'structured knowledge' (Larsson, 1983), and `transmitting the teachers' knowledge' (Prosser et al., 1994).

Although some small differences may exist in the terms, central to all these descriptions is the perception that teaching is a process of transmitting knowledge, and that knowledge is something external to students, transmitted only by the lecturers. This category proved to be very popular - all lecturers responded to this category with 21 responses (see Table 8. 3).

Category B in this thesis makes an additional finding to other similar research findings. It is apparently the most popular category and generated the most responses. There were 36 responses, that is 33% of all the responses (see Table 8.3). It emphasises the importance of how to organise, arrange and present the subject content in a way that is easier for the students to understand (Lindblom-Ylanne et al., 2006). Most revealing in this thesis was the fact that all lecturers in the interview emphasised heavily the importance of explaining the subject to their students by using uncomplicated language, notes and examples.

Category C of this research was similar to the `organisational' conception identified by Biggs (1990), which highlighted institutional responsibility for knowledge and setting course standards. Similarly Fox's (1983) `shaping theory' focuses on shaping students according to institutional standards, such as producing 'competent accountants'. Although the 'shaping theory' refers to general institutional standards, Category C of this study centres primarily on the course requirements focusing mainly on examinations and quizzes. Hence this category emphasises the lecturers' responsibility for maintaining standards in accordance with the college's course requirements.

In Category D, the lecturer is still the prime initiator of learning. Category D stands in the middle as the link between categories A, B, C and E, F. There were 12 responses - 11% of the total. It describes the role of the lecturer as an important factor in promoting professionalism and in expanding the general understanding of the subject. The lecturer is the presenter and the role model but also the facilitator of knowledge. Teaching is seen as lecturer-facilitated and the aim is for students to start actively developing professionally.

Unlike other similar research, Category D, in this study, emphasises the role of the lecturer in developing good relations with students. The lecturer, through his/her own behaviour, aims to motivate students through interaction, and to help develop practical skills in a professional manner. All the same, there is a clear focus on the lecturers in terms of what they are doing within this relationship.

The lecturer/student interaction has been shown to be a sophisticated form of the lecturer-facilitated perspective, in which students are active participants (Prosser et al., 2005). Similar results were reached in a recent analysis by Samuelowicz and Bain (2001).

However, very few conceptions can be found in the literature that is parallel to Category D of this study. Pratt's (1992) `nurturing' conception may be the nearest to it. Pratt argued that this refers to teacher-student interactions which includes aspects of 'caring, emotional support, and personal relationships' (214).

Category D also shares some ideas with Fox's (1983) 'growing theory' which refers to what is happening to the student as a person. Category D does not limit itself to just the academic development of the student but includes student's professional development. This category indicates that good conduct and professional attitudes need to be promoted through the influence of lecturers. This is an important distinction which differentiates this conception from other similar studies. This was a common concern amongst the lecturers, as was pointed out by Mary and Elias.

> Teachers have to transfer values and you have to attach them towards the learning that I have mentioned (Elias, MGT 101).
>
> I think it is very important for the students to be able to respect their lecturers and the lecturer to put forward an image that encourages students to follow in that they are becoming professionals (Mary, ACC 101).

Categories E and F entail more complex or higher-level thinking, focusing on teaching as the exploration of meaning and student development. This involves the lecturer engaging and involving the students in critical thinking and problem-solving activities as expressed by Kate, a lecturer in Management.

> I want them to have a critical and analytical mind. It is important because they need to go outside in the world and they need not always be followers but be leaders too (Kate , MGT 101).

The role of the lecturer is thus shifted from passive teaching to that of active teaching. There is a shift from teaching-oriented activity to that of student-orientated activity - the ability to conceive teaching as a qualitative process.

Within these categories, teaching is viewed as student-dependent. The intention is for the students to develop their own conceptions of the subject. The content of teaching is not determined by the syllabus and examinations alone, but includes issues and methods of learning that go beyond subject knowledge and skill attainment. Learning occurs when one is able to change intellectually and grow as an individual.

Most specifically, Category E is taken to mean an aspect underlying knowledge and relates more closely to human intellect. This conception cannot just be conveyed by lecturers

through their teaching; rather, it must be developed by students themselves in the process of learning or practising - thus bringing about conceptual change.

Some conceptions identified by other researchers in the literature share ideas in common with Category E. For example, Dunkin (1990) identified a conception of `teaching as motivating learning', and Martin and Balla (1991) identified a conception of `teaching as encouraging active learning'. Larsson (1983) talked about 'helping students learn', whereas Dall'Alba (1991) referred to it as, 'exploring ways to understand'. These conceptions focus on motivating students' learning by, for example, `providing enough interesting material to maintain stimulation' (Dunkin, 1990: 58). However, Category E does not only mean the `facilitation' of the learning process, but also includes the development of good learning approaches and attitudes through interaction as one of the aims of teaching. This is a vital issue which distinguishes the present category from other similar findings. For example, Pratt's (1992) `apprenticeship conception' is based upon a belief that 'a body of established wisdom and knowledge exists, in the form of expert practitioners, and is to be handed down from those who know, to those who don't know' (Pratt, 1992: 212).

Category E does not mean that lecturers hand down 'good attitudes to students'; rather it emphasises an embedded way of helping students to develop good learning approaches through active participation (Jin and Cortazzi, 1998; Watkins and Biggs, 1996).

Category F is the least popular with only 11 responses, which is 10% of the total responses. This last category has some similarities with Fox's (1983) 'student initiated learning /with

focus to student change'. Similarly, it relates to Dall'Alba's (1991) 'bringing about conceptual change' conception, and Trigwell's, et al., (1994) 'conceptual change and student focus'. However, a point that was not mentioned in the other research studies, is that Category F goes further in student development by maintaining that teaching should be a process of facilitating students to develop intellectually and become independent responsible learners. The focus is on the growth of the student both as an individual and as a professional.

8.4 Brief Summary

From the above comparisons, it can be seen that the overall teaching conceptions identified in this research reflect, to some extent, those identified in previous research studies. Nevertheless, the sharp focus on how knowledge is presented, the emphasis on developing professionalism and good attitudes as well as building good relationships, seem to characterise the teaching conceptions held by the lecturers teaching Business courses in higher education in Cyprus.

This chapter did not centre on examining *why* lecturers have more than one conception of teaching; rather, it revealed that lecturers do have different perceptions in supporting their conceptual framework of teaching.

CHAPTER 9

Findings and Discussion

STUDENTS' CONCEPTIONS OF LEARNING

9.1 Introduction

The discussion of the findings supports the view within the literature that research into conceptions of learning within a multi-subject context is still limited. The findings of this study make a contribution in extending the literature in this area of research.

Six categories of conceptions of students' learning were identified. As in the case of teaching, these categories were perceived as forming a kind of hierarchy. Each category, with the exception of Category D, included characteristics of the conceptions before it (Byrne and Flood, 2004). Further more, most of the conceptions were linked with each other and therefore could not be viewed as independent of each other.

9.3 Conceptions of Learning – Discussion of the Findings

The findings indicated that some students hold several conceptions at the same time. For example, Theo reported having higher-level conceptions, as indicated in Categories E and F but at the same time she also supported conceptions in Category A. This signified that holding higher-level conceptions did not necessary mean that one abandoned the lower-level conceptions (Dahlgren, 1984; Johansson et al., 1985; Dahlgren and Marton, 1978; Svensson and Hogfors, 1988). From this, one may conclude that the student's view of learning their Business subjects appeared to consist of a combination of different conceptions. Indeed, Dahlgren (1984) found that people tended to explain concepts

differently, depending on the subject of the enquiry. The following table (Table 9.1) provides a summary of the six conceptions of learning as expressed by the students. It identifies each category in terms of their level, aim, orientation and activity of the corresponding category.

Table 9.1: The Levels, Aim, Ordination and Activity of the Learning Conceptions

Levels of Conceptions	Aim of Learning	Orientation of Learning	Learning Activity
Lower-level Conceptions	*Category A*: Receiving subject knowledge	*Subject-oriented*	*Lecturer- dependent*
	Category B: Receiving subject knowledge in a clear, comprehensible manner		
	Category C: Studying and memorising the subject knowledge with the aim of reproducing it at a future time		
	Category D: The lecturer as a role model in the process of learning		
Higher-level Conceptions	*Category E:* Learning through involvement and through understanding the subject knowledge	*Learning-oriented*	*Student-dependent*
	Category F: Learning as the self development of student into responsible human being		

From the table above, it is not difficult to see that the conceptions of students' learning fall into two distinct sets of categories, described in this thesis as: 'higher-level' and 'lower-

level' categories. This finding distinguishes it from the lecturers' conceptions where categories are divided into three sets.

Categories A, B, C and D are perceived as 'subject-oriented' and 'lecturer-dependent' and are characterised as lower-level categories (see Table 9.1). These categories view learning as a passive activity involving merely the attainment of the subject knowledge, hence they are viewed as subject-oriented. In this case, the lecturers are seen as the main contributors to knowledge and students totally depend on them, thus the term 'lecturer-dependent'.

Categories E and F, on the other hand, are perceived as 'learning-oriented' and 'student-dependent' and are characterised as higher-level categories. They involve an active view of learning, the centre of which is the student him/her self. This entails that learning is dependent on the student's own ability to understand and apply knowledge, which will eventually help him/her to grow and develop as a person. Similar distinctions were made by other research studies, such as those by Saljo (1979, Marton et al., (1993) and Dahlgren and Marton (1978).

The key difference between the two sets of categories is the focus on 'meaning in learning'. The first four have been described as constituting reproductive or surface conceptions of learning, and they usually result in 'low-level' learning outcomes. The last two are seen to represent a deep or constructivist view and are commonly associated with learning outcomes which indicate greater complexity of cognitive processing (Van Rossum and Schenk, 1984).

Ramsden (1992) distinguished between the two sets of categories as 'reproduction-oriented' and 'meaning-oriented' conceptions. According to Ramsden, reproduction-oriented learning focuses on memorising by repeating isolated facts. The information is not changed by the learner - there is no attempt at interpreting of information; it is simply there to be used. Marton et al. (1993) shared similar views and proposed that the reproductive-constructivist distinction was largely related to the role of meaning in learning. In an earlier study, Saljo (1979) noted that lower-level conceptions represented a 'taken-for-granted' view of learning. The notion of 'meaning', therefore, is absent from the first group of conceptions.

The second group, however, is primarily concerned with the creation of 'meaning'. A 'meaning-oriented' conception is considered to consist solely of constructive activities, allowing the learner to integrate new information within his/her own conceptual framework. Holders of these conceptions gain a better understanding of the subject by abstracting meaning from what is presented, thus constituting a notion of change. Whereas in the first set of conceptions, there is no attempt at evaluating information (it is simply accepted and used), in the second set of conceptions there is often critical review of the facts as they have been presented. Knowledge is therefore viewed from one's own perspective rather than perceived as an unchangeable, externally-given collection of facts and procedures (Purdie et al., 1996).

In looking at the categories more closely it can be seen that Categories A, B, C and D emerge as the predominant categories with Category C having the highest number of responses (see Table 9. 2). These responses accounted for a total of 128 and represented

76% of all the responses. They came from all four subjects with Accounting, Marketing and Management having the highest scores (see Table 9.3). The categories with the fewest responses were Category E with a total of 18 responses and Category F with 22, forming 25% of the total. Most surprising was the fact that the highest scores in these higher-level categories were also made from the field of Management and Accounting courses. The table below (Table 9.2) indicates the students' responses for each category and for each subject.

Table 9.2: Responses of students in relation to each category

Categories	**No of Responses**	% of Total Responses	**No of Students responded**	% of Total Students
A	24	14 %	10	83%
B	29	17 %	10	83%
C	38	23 %	12	100%
D	37	22%	11	92%
E	18	12%	9	75%
F	22	13 %	10	83%
Total responses	168	(100%)	12	100%

The first column of Table 9.2 indicates the six categories. The second column shows the responses recorded by the students for each category. The third shows the percentage of responses in each category against the total number of responses. The fourth column indicates the number of students who responded for each category. The fifth illustrates the percentage of the total number of students for each category. For example, 10 students (that is 83% of total number) gave 24 responses, for Category A (that is 14% of the total responses). Table 9.3 below illustrates the responses made by the students in relation to each subject and for each category.

Table 9.3: Responses of students in relation to each subject

Subjects	**Categories**					
	A	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**	**F**
	No of resps	**No of resps**	**No of resps**	**No of resps**	**No of resps**	**No of resps**
Introduction to Accounting	8	5	12	10	8	7
Introduction to Management	5	12	9	13	6	8
Introduction to Marketing	7	10	9	6	2	3
Introduction to Economics	4	2	8	8	2	4
Total	24	29	38	37	18	22

The first column of Table 9.3, under the heading 'subjects', indicates the four disciplines. The second column, under the heading 'categories', represents the responses made by the students for each category and for each subject. For example, there were eight responses for Category A in Accounting and a total of 38 responses for Category C for all subjects. The tables only serve to draw an overall picture of the students' responses in each category and are not intended to quantify the results.

Categories A, B and C assume that knowledge is something concrete and specific and a means to an end. It is evident that the majority of students in the initial stages of their Business Studies recognise little need to construct or relate knowledge to life outside the college. In other words, the students apparently perceive their subject as distant and 'detached'. Lucas (2000) referred to these students as seeing the world with 'detachment'.

It was quite clear that most of the students studying at the college spend much of their time and energy acquiring and memorising the lecturers' notes.

The bulk of the students view their lecturer as the absolute authority in the specific Business subject and they relied heavily on them to convey knowledge (Saljo, 1979). They totally depended 'on their ability to convey information in a meaningful framework' (Mulligan and Kirkpatrick, 2000: 312). They were often considered as the most qualified people to explain the subjects and in a more comprehensible form than textbooks (Baldwin, 1993). In Category A, for example, learning is evidently seen as a 'passive act' **(**Pillay and Boulton-Lewis, 2000: 171). There were 24 responses (10 out of 12). The majority of responses came from the field of Accounting (see Table 9.3). This is perhaps due to the fact that Accounting has more to do with formulas and facts than any of the other subjects. In general terms, students described learning their subjects as something that is imposed on them, for they have nothing to gain personally. In doing so, it was obvious that students preferred a very 'certain and stable learning context' (Sharma, 1997: 133).

One most surprising finding which was not reported in any of the previous research studies was the heavy emphasis students placed on notes - particularly in Category B – **s**pecifically, notes prepared by the lecturers. In fact, the students regarded the provision of written information as one of the most important learning activities. There were 29 responses, 83% of all the students responded in this category, mainly from the field of Management.

In Category C, learning is viewed as knowledge that could be gathered, measured and tested. Students expressing such views apparently did not see the need to personalise

learning (Van Rossum, Deijkers, and Hamer 1985). It was quite obvious that students were preoccupied with gathering notes and acquiring studying techniques for one and only purpose - to pass examinations. Obtaining good grades was the main justification for learning their respective Business subjects. As such, they expected their lecturers to provide them with clear methods of assessment and grading. All 12 students responded in this category, making it the most popular category with a total of 38 responses (23% of all the students' responses). Results in other studies have confirmed similar findings (Sharma, 1997; Byrne and Flood, 2004).

In Category D, however, the findings reveal an interesting variation that was not evident in many of the other research studies. Students in all the subjects perceived the lecturer as representing a role model who could inspire and challenge them. Category D stands in the middle and between Categories A, B, C and E, F. Although this category does not appear to be directly linked to the other conceptions, it is very much lecturer-dependent and is considered by students as extremely vital to learning. Hence, this category is regarded as a lower-level category and not an intermediate category, such as was found in the lecturers' conceptions and in other similar studies. Kember, for example, in his 1997 study, presented his middle category as a bridge between the two major sets.

Category D was amongst the most popular with 37 responses. Nearly all students (11 out of 12) responded to this category. It emphasised the role of the lecturer in the process of learning. In particular, it highlighted the lecturer's own personality in building good relationships with the students. Again, in this category, students see the lecturer as

providing a role model and also being responsible for promoting a good atmosphere in class.

Indeed, early studies (for example, Wubbels, Brekelmans and Hooymayers, 1991) have shown the vital importance of interpersonal relations in student learning. A considerable amount of variance in student outcomes was explained by the teacher-student relationships. Further, students associated this relationship with good teaching. In fact, Kagan and Tippins (1991) stated that a good student-lecturer relationship may be a prerequisite for instructional strategies affecting students' learning. This category was somewhat different from the other categories, as it concentrated basically on relations formed between lecturer and student rather than how the subject knowledge was perceived.

It can be safely concluded at this stage that Categories A, B, C and D, described above, represented learning as subject-oriented/lecturer-dependent. More than half of the participants saw learning primarily as acquiring subject knowledge with the aim of reproducing it in response to assessment and exam requirements.

Students holding Conceptions E and F take a more holistic view of learning. They view learning as centring on the concept of meaning or understanding. These categories convey a more constructive perception of learning (Van Rossum et al., 1985; Marton et al., 1993). Students with such views apparently believe learning to be a personal activity, where learning is internalised (Byrne and Flood, 2004). In other words, students appeared to be actively engaged in the learning process and had begun to realise the importance of 'integrating newly-acquired knowledge with their prior learning and personal experiences'

(Marton and Booth, 1997: 37). Categories E and F suggest a higher-level of thinking, focusing on learning as the exploration of meaning and the development of one's self. The act of learning is viewed as 'learning-oriented and student-dependent'.

In Category E, students saw classroom activities as providing a foundation on which they could build their own knowledge of the subject. Students in this category considered their involvement in activities, such as discussions and teamwork with others, as a means of learning. Unlike Categories A, B and C, such activities were far more than merely exchanging information – they were used for clarifying and analysing people's views (Lord and Robertson, 2006; Marton et al., 1993).

There was evidence to suggest that students who responded to Category F indicated that they understood how knowledge of a subject was linked to their future life. In doing so, they were able to see the personal relevance of what they had learnt. There were approximately 22 responses to Category F (around 13% of the total responses). More students in this research were found to share views in Category F than in many of the previous studies, such as those carried out by Marton (1993) and Sharma (1997). One of the explanations I can give is perhaps the age of some of the students in the sample - about four in the group had an average age of 33.

Of particular relevance to this study is the relationship between how students conceived their respective subjects and their approaches to learning. As already discussed in the Literature Review Chapter, the body of research of conceptions of learning has given rise to the idea of 'surface' and 'deep' approaches to learning. Surface learning concentrates on

parts rather than the whole, and on facts and details rather than meaning. Students taking a surface approach, apparently do not link new topics to what they already know, and may simply memorise enough to pass their exams (Lord and Robertson, 2006; Biggs, 2003). Students with less 'complex conceptions' of learning as in Categories A, B and C are more likely to take a surface approach to learning. Similar results were reported by Van Rossum and Schenk (1984); Leveson (2004) and Sharma (1997).

Students taking a surface approach try to fit subject knowledge into a particular format. This was confirmed by the students' overwhelming responses for note-taking and passing exams. This is most clearly represented by Categories B and C. Sharma (1997) found similar results in his research of second-year Accounting students.

Students holding lower-level conceptions were much more likely to adopt surface-approaches to learning as opposed to those searching for the underlying meaning in understanding. These students were more likely to adopt higher-level conceptions or deep approaches to learning (Leveson, 2004).

This concentration of responses at the surface or lower-level of learning, confirmed Chan's findings of a pre-dominance of students with surface approaches to learning choosing to study Business courses (Chan et al., 1989). Lucas (2001) contributed to the literature of student approaches to learning with her category, 'students' intentions'. She showed that students taking a deep approach to learning 'have an intention to relate what they learn to aspects . . . that are intrinsically important to them' (Lucas, 2001: 168).

Most recently, however, researchers and in particular, Accounting researchers have questioned the division of surface and deep approaches. Hall et al. (2004) found that lower-level strategies, such as rote learning can be used simultaneously with a deep approach. In fact, Cooper (2004) argued that, 'while surface approaches to learning can be associated with mechanical rote learning, it can be used to deepen understanding and achieve high levels of academic performance' (289).

It has been reported in this thesis, that studies undertaken in Western societies have usually viewed repetition and memorisation as the antithesis of the search for understanding (Watkins and Regmi, 1992). In contrast, Asian students do not regard memorisation and understanding as opposites; rather they see them as intertwined activities, in that meaningful memorisation contributes to understanding. These studies illustrated that different educational contexts define learning according to different social and culturally established conventions. From the data so far, Cypriot students appear to display similar characteristics to those found in Asian studies. Judging from the high number of responses to Categories E and F as well as to Categories A and B, this evidence may suggest that the 'paradox of the Chinese learner' (Marton, Dall'Alba, and Tse, 1996) may apply to the Cypriot students too.

9.3 Brief Summary

The students responded strongly in the first four categories (A, B, C and D), especially those taking Marketing, Accounting and Management. The findings suggested that the learning conceptions of students in the four Business subjects could be perceived mainly as subject-oriented and lecturer-dependent, characterised as surface learning. There was clear

evidence to suggest that students were highly syllabus-bound in their approaches to learning, and there was little recognition of the need to seek relationships between different aspects of the knowledge acquired. These results confirmed previous research findings. For example Sharma (1997: 135) found that 'many of the students perceive learning as acquiring knowledge rather than as understanding and constructive analysis'.

What distinguished Conceptions E and F from the first four categories is that learning is viewed as 'learning-oriented and student-dependent'. Students with these conceptions saw learning as an individualistic, self-determined and career-oriented process (Van Rossum et al., 1985), or in the words of An , a student of Management, as 'to better yourself'.

CHAPTER **10**

Findings and Discussion

COMPARISONS BETWEEN LECTURERS' CONCEPTIONS OF TEACHING AND STUDENTS' CONCEPTIONS OF LEARNING

10.3 Introduction

The main purpose of this thesis was to investigate and report on the conceptions of teaching held by lecturers in introductory Business courses and the conceptions of learning held by the students taking such courses. The results were presented and discussed in Chapters 8 and 9. A synopsis of all the conceptions described in this thesis is sketched out in Appendix III. In this chapter, an attempt is made to investigate any possible relationships between the two sets of categories. Doing so makes this study one of the few, and the first in Cyprus, to report on the possible links between the qualitatively different conceptions of teaching and the qualitatively different conceptions of learning. Unlike previous research, this study focused on exploring both the lecturers' and students' conceptions of teaching and learning simultaneously, rather than the students' conceptions of their lecturer's teaching, or the lecturers' conceptions of their students' learning - and to show any relationships between the two types of conceptions.

A major drive for exploring conceptions is the assumption that conceptions of teaching influence conceptions of learning. Many studies in the past have identified various relationships between conceptions of teaching, approaches to teaching, approaches to learning and possible learning outcomes. Some of these have been identified in Chapter 9.

However, the extent of this relationship is yet not fully understood within the context of higher education (Leveson, 2004).

In this chapter, the categories of conceptions and any possible relationships between them are discussed, highlighting major agreements as well as some interesting differences between the lecturers' and students' experiences of the same phenomenon.

10.4 The Conceptions of Teaching and Learning: Levels of Categories

The aim and 'content' of the conceptions of teaching on the one hand and the conceptions of learning on the other differ in many ways, but at a general level, comparisons and relationships can be made. Both types of conceptions focused on transmitting and acquiring subject knowledge, and, to a lesser extent, on the self-development of students. The latter was less evident within the students' responses (see Table 10.1).

Table 10.1: Comparisons between Conceptions of Teaching and Conceptions of Learning Categories

Conceptions of Teaching Categories	**Conceptions of Learning Categories**
Teaching-oriented **L E C T U R E R** **LOWER**	***Subject-oriented*** **D E P E N D E N T** **LEVEL**
MIDDLE LEVEL	
Student- oriented **S T U D E N T** **HIGHER**	***Learning-oriented*** **D E P E N D E N T** **LEVEL**

By glancing at the above table (10.1), it can be seen that there are some differences between the two sets of categories but there are also remarkable similarities. In the first set, the conceptions of teaching, there are three levels of categories, whereas in the second set, the conceptions of learning, there are only two. A broad similarity, however, was evident in that both sets contained lower as well as higher-level conceptions, namely lecturer-dependent and student-dependent (see also Table 10.2).

In an effort to compare the two sets of categories, an attempt is made here to first evaluate the 'lower-level' conceptions expressed by both the lecturers and students concurrently, and then the 'higher-level' conceptions (see Table 10.1). The middle category applies only to the lecturers.

10.2.1 The Lower-Level Conceptions of Teaching and Learning

The main assumption is that both learning and teaching within the lower-level categories is regarded as either 'teaching-oriented or subject-oriented' and is seen as mainly a dualistic activity. The transmission or acquisition of knowledge characterised both sets and are described as 'lecturer – dependent' activities. The overall conclusion is that the student is a passive follower relying on the lecturer whose responsibility is to hand down knowledge (see Tables 10.1 and 10.2).

10.2.2 The Higher-Level Conceptions of Teaching and Learning

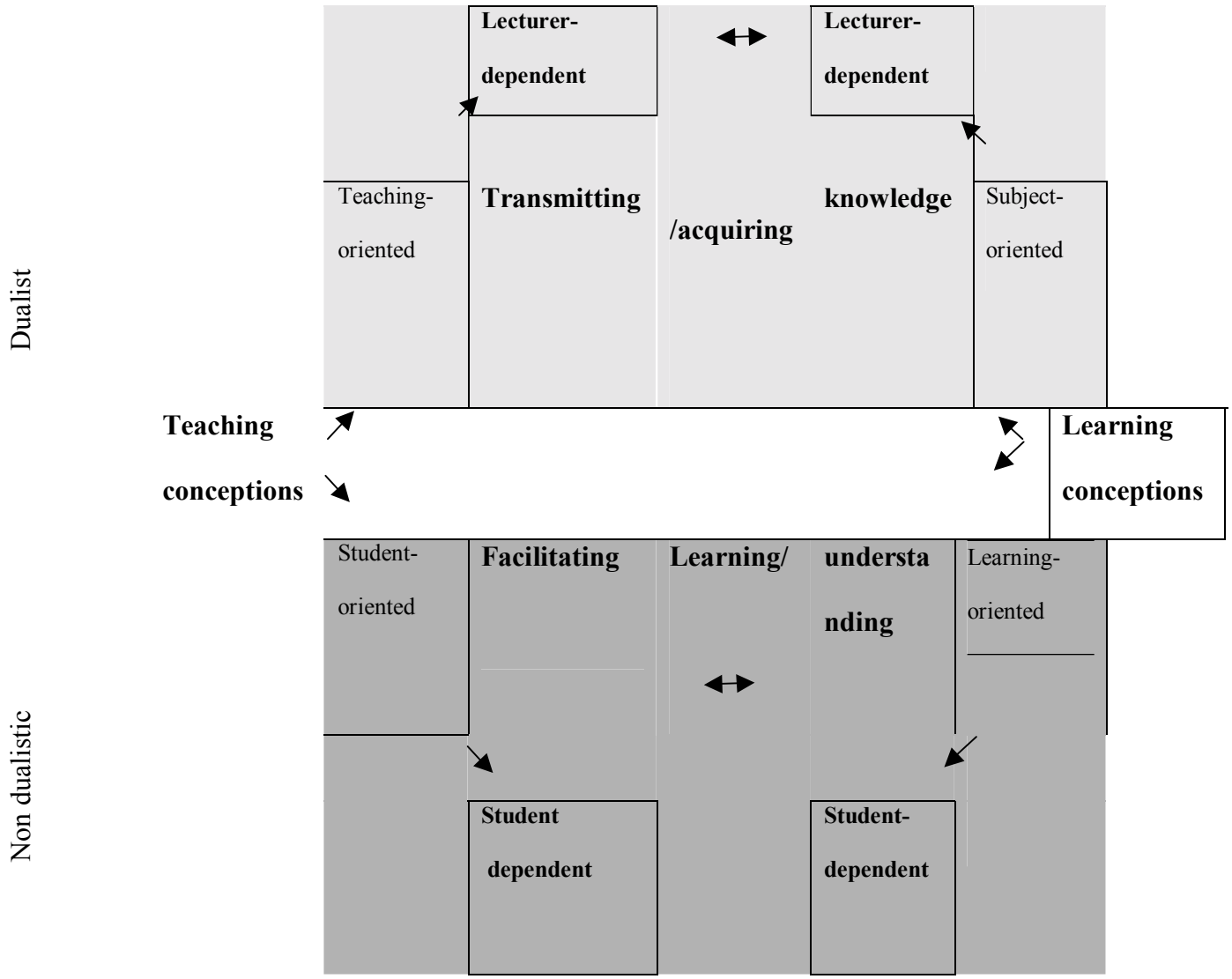
The higher-level categories - referred to in this thesis as either 'student-oriented or learning-oriented perspectives (see Tables 10.1 and 10.2) - regard learning and teaching as non-dualistic activities and emphasise the students' inclination towards independent thinking and self-

development. In a way, students become responsible for their own academic learning and professional development. Lecturers, meanwhile, facilitate this learning process rather than merely concentrate on the transmission of knowledge.

10.2.3 The Middle-Level Conceptions of Teaching

A most unexpected conception, which stands alone between the two perspectives, and applies only to the lecturers, is the middle level category (see Table10.1). This indicates the lecturers' overwhelming concern to promote good behaviour and professionalism amongst their students.

Table 10.2 : Comparisons between Lower- Level and Higher-Level Conceptions of Teaching and Learning



10.3 Themes Derived from the Conceptions of Teaching and Learning

Given the analytical framework of the conceptions reported by the participants, it was possible to identify five general themes which emerged from this study. The five themes are presented here as the differences between extremes on a continuum of learning and teaching conceptions. It would be more appropriate to think of the conceptions as unevenly spread along a line, between 'teaching and student-oriented' and 'subject and learning-oriented' continuums. Responses tended to occupy the full range, from one end to the other.

10.3.1 Conceptions of Teaching: Themes

The top row of Table 10.3 shows the six conceptions of teaching identified in this study. The dimensions indicated in the first column of the table are the themes which surfaced from this research. The most teaching-oriented/lecturer-dependent conceptions are located in the left-hand columns. The most student-oriented/student-dependent conceptions are located in the right-hand side of the table.

Table 10.3: Themes derived from the conceptions of teaching

	Transmitting the subject knowledge	***Presenting the subject knowledge***	***Helping students to learn and understand their subjects/checking knowledge***	***Developing the students into professional people and well-behaved human beings***	***Interacting with students, and helping them to develop their own understanding of the subjects***	***Nurturing the self development of students into responsible human beings***
Nature of teaching	To transmit the subject	To present the subject	To help students acquire the subject	To promote well behaved and professional behaviour	To facilitate students' practical involvement	To develop students' own understanding
Nature of subject knowledge	Constructed by lecturer	Constructed by lecturer through demonstrations and notes	Assessed/evaluated by lecturer	Promoted through professional interactions	Actively facilitated by lecturer but constructed by student	Personalised by the student
Approaches to teaching	Presenting the subject by using straightforward, clear methods	Presenting and demonstrating subject using notes, illustrations and clear language	Monitoring the learning of subject through exercises, quizzes and exams	Engaging in student friendly interactions	Facilitating student participation through discussions/projects	Facilitating the self-development of student
Role of lecturer	Presenter and subject deliverer	Presenter and performer of the subject	Presenter of the subject but also evaluator of student knowledge	Acting as a professional role model	Facilitator in students' own learning	Facilitator- but student is responsible for own learning
Outcomes of teaching	Providing expert subject knowledge	Providing records of the subject	Providing the means by which the students pass their exams /quizzes successfully	Promoting professionalism and good behaviour	Facilitating the development of students as individuals	The development of independent and professional people

Teaching-oriented /lecturer-dependent → ***Student-oriented /student-dependent***

10.3.2 Conceptions of Learning: Themes

The top row of Table 10.4 indicates the six conceptions of learning. The first column of the table shows the themes of learning which emerged from the study. The most subject-oriented/lecturer-dependent conceptions are on the left-hand side of the table. The most learning-oriented/student-dependent conceptions are located at the right-hand side of the table.

Table 10. 4: Themes derived from the conceptions of learning

	Receiving subject knowledge	***Receiving subject knowledge through easy- to-understand methods***	***Acquiring subject knowledge through reproduction***	***Learning through the role and behaviour of the lecturers in the classroom***	***Exposed to activities that generate understanding of the subjects***	***Learning means developing students' views and changing them as people in general.***
Nature of learning	Acquire the subject	Acquire the subject in clear and structured form	Acquire the subject by studying /remembering	Involved in friendly interactions between students and lecturer	Involved in practical activities	Promoting the self- development of student
Nature of subject knowledge	Passively received from the lecturer	Passively received through written information	Studied for reproduction of information	Promoted through friendly interactions	Actively constructed by student	Personalised by the student
Approaches to learning	Receive the subject directly from the lecturer	Receive the subject through explanations and demonstrations by the lecturer	By studying, memorising and reproducing knowledge	By engaging in friendly relationships with the lecturers	Engaged in practical activities	Using a variety of methods to construct own independent knowledge
Role of student	Recipient of the subject	Recipient of concrete knowledge of subject	Ability to reproduce the subject	Dependency on lecturer for professional guidance and support	Practical involvement in learning activities with the help of lecturer	Student is responsible for own learning
Outcomes of learning	Accumulation of the subject	Acquire written records of the subject	Ability to pass exams and quizzes	Involved in student/lecturer interactions	active participation of student	The development of students' independent thinking/building a career

Subject-oriented / lecturer-dependent → ***Learning-oriented /student-dependent***

The five themes or patterns emerging from both the conceptions of learning and the conceptions of teaching are as follows:

- Nature of teaching vs Nature of learning
- Nature of subject knowledge
- Approaches to teaching vs Approaches to learning
- Role of lecturer vs Role of student
- Outcomes of teaching vs Outcomes of learning

10.4 Nature of Teaching vs. Nature of Learning

This theme indicates the dichotomy between the positivist and constructivist views of the nature of both learning and teaching. Results presented confirmed the major distinction between the 'teaching-oriented' and 'student-oriented' conceptions of teaching, on the one hand, and the 'subject-orientated' and 'learning-oriented 'conceptions of learning on the other, and clearly showed the basic differences between these two broad groupings.

From this, it was safe to assume that lecturers in the introductory Business courses appear to hold, predominantly, 'reproductive' (lower-level) views of teaching. It is important to note, however, that many lecturers made it clear in their interviews that they adopted these teaching strategies out of necessity rather than choice, and in accordance with their students' requests (see Chapter 11 for more details).

It was apparently obvious that students, too, hold lower-level conceptions of learning. For the students, learning was considered essential, not just to gain knowledge per se, but also to enhance their career prospects. Learning, it seems, had become an important part of their lives – in a sense a commitment. This is very characteristic of Cypriot society where a great deal of money and effort is invested in education. Students often saw it as their duty to acquire knowledge but not necessarily as a means for their own self- development.

In conclusion, I wish to re-emphasise a major assumption of the study. It appears that lecturers who reported adopting more of a teaching-oriented approach apparently had students who themselves adopted a subject-oriented approach to learning.

10.5 The Nature of Subject Knowledge

The results which surfaced from the study do not support any distinctions between the different types of subject knowledge or disciplines (Dall'Alba (1991). All lecturers, irrespective of the subject they taught, saw knowledge as a combination of its theoretical and applied elements and expected students to be able to learn and apply it. They did not particularly differentiate between the four subjects used in this research. This is in line with Norton's, Richardson's, Hartley's, Newstead's and Mayes's (2005) findings that teachers teaching similar subjects under the same discipline umbrella had relatively similar conceptions of teaching. Prosser et al., (1994) found analogous findings. At the same time, however, these results seem to be inconsistent with Ramsden's and Entwistle's (1981) findings. They concluded that the differences between lecturers' conceptions are related to

the type of disciplines they teach. Further empirical research may resolve this apparent contradiction.

Knowledge in this study irrespective of the discipline is mainly seen as external to students - contained in notes and possessed by the lecturer. There were, however, some exceptions. Indeed, evidence suggested that some students saw the usefulness of personalising knowledge so that it could eventually guide their professional and personal lives. This aspect of knowledge shows similarities with the themes used by other researchers such as Pratt (1992); Thomson (1992); Brickhouse (1990); Bain's (1998)

10.6 Approaches to Teaching vs. Approaches to Learning

Most of the students placed a strong emphasis on learning through prepared material. They preferred knowledge to be a well-structured or 'fixed body' of information which can be readily 'picked up' and applied in all situations. In fact, many students complained when lecturers did not give comprehensive and systematic notes about major concepts which they were expected to learn. In this way, I can safely state that the majority of Cypriot college students adopted surface approaches to learning (Trigwell et al. 1999).

It was also clear that the majority of lecturers reported that they also focused on the content of the syllabus and on preparing good handouts. These results implied that the approaches to teaching apparently support Schommer's (1994) idea of 'naïve' conceptions of teaching.

In summary, the 'approaches' research, despite being heavily criticised by Haggis (2003), has contributed to an understanding of the contextual and conceptual nature of learning and teaching. From this perspective, results from this study have added to this understanding.

10.7 The Role of the Lecturer vs. The Role of the Student

Central to this theme is the implicit message that the content of teaching and learning is not confined to the course syllabus, textbooks and examinations, but includes issues [of daily life] and processes of teaching beyond knowledge. How the lecturers perform and behave in the class is part of this theme. It is assumed that lecturers adopt the right attributes and conduct themselves properly. Students commented widely on the importance of friendly relationships with their lecturers.

From this point of view, lecturers act as role models in students' learning and personal development. It is obvious that the lecturers' role played an important part in this research. The responses emphasised the importance students placed on their lecturers being sociable, friendly and supportive. They also focused on how lecturers acted and supported students becoming knowledgeable but, most importantly, professionally-behaved men and women.

The lecturer-student relationship is recognised by several researchers as an important element in teaching and learning (Prosser et al., 1994). However, the focus of this conception, (that is, role of the lecturer in the development of the student) as found in this study, has concentrated on the degree of 'interaction' rather than on the actual 'nature' of this

relationship. Although this is a unique finding not disclosed in previous studies, perhaps a better explanation of the pattern of these interactions is needed in future research.

10.8 Outcomes of Teaching vs. Outcomes of Learning

Students tended to hold utilitarian and practical views about the outcomes of their learning – namely, to acquire certain knowledge in order to achieve certain goals. These were mostly contained in passing course examinations and obtaining good grades, leading to professional and academic qualifications and eventually a career in business. The majority of them were unable to explore the underlying assumptions or ideologies of their particular discipline and often ignored critical reflection in the learning process.

Many of the lecturers emphasised the outcomes of teaching as mainly fulfilling the course objectives. Some, however, believed that the outcomes of teaching should go beyond qualifications and involved promoting students' personal and social development. Such conceptions, though, were recognised as being difficult to put into practice at introductory stages.

What contributes to the significance of these results is the lecturers' conceptions of teaching and their possible effect on students' learning outcomes. Indeed, over many years, research has indicated that teaching may influence the quality of students' learning outcomes (Trigwell and Prosser 1991; Ramsden 1992).

10.9 Brief Summary

This chapter has presented an analytical comparison of the learning and teaching conceptions of the students and lecturers at a local college. The results of the framework not only confirmed the relationship between lower-level conceptions (the lecturer-oriented and subject-oriented conceptions), and higher level conceptions (the learning-oriented and student-oriented conceptions), but indicated some basic differences between these two groups of categories. At the same time, it showed what would appear to be a direct link between conceptions of teaching and conceptions of learning. Five themes on teaching and learning conceptions emerged which were examined and discussed.

In general terms, Cypriot lecturers deliver knowledge but also provide opportunities for students to learn, develop and grow. However, the lecturers overwhelmingly reported that teaching introductory Business courses resulted mainly in transferring knowledge to students using simplified steps, notes and other means. Likewise, their students insisted that the most important element in studying Business subjects is the acquisition of the course content in the form of written explanations. The results also pointed out that Cypriot students place a heavy emphasis on having good and friendly relationships with their lecturers – regarding it as paramount to their learning.

The conceptions of learning held by the students were expressed primarily as passing examinations and obtaining degrees. Equally important were the lecturers' conceptions which associated classroom teaching and promoting professionalism and good behaviour. The implications of these findings are outlined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 11

Implications of the Research Findings

WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO TEACHER EDUCATION

11.3 Introduction

Whilst it was not the purpose of this research to uncover *why* lecturers and their students view the introductory courses in particular ways, it was important, however, to know that they did so, and that these had several serious implications for college and university teaching. Furthermore, the chapter stresses the importance of teacher education programmes and draws on vital references as to how conceptions of teaching may have a role to play in the design of such programmes.

At a time of a growing interest in higher education in Cyprus, the findings of this study are intended to investigate the idea that conceptions *can* provide evidence of how lecturers think and how this may relate to their students' learning. Without a doubt, the results indicate that there is a definite need for lecturers to examine their students' views of learning and subsequently evaluate their own teaching practices. This may provide a challenge to the whole organisation of college and university teaching.

11.4 Implications of the Findings

The importance of this research was in displaying the lecturers' conceptions of teaching concerning the Business introductory courses as being broadly linked to the beliefs and conceptions of learning held by their students.

At a general glance, the findings implied what would appear to be consistent with most previous findings. They implied that the academics' conceptions of teaching are related to the conceptions of learning held by their students which, in this study, indicated predominance in lower-level conceptions of learning and to a lesser extent teaching (Quinlan 1999; Trigwell et al. 1994; Trigwell and Prosser 1996b). At the same time, however and contrary to previous studies, results signified some interesting assumptions which may contribute to extending our understanding about conceptions.

The findings implied that: a) the widespread students' 'reproductive' (lower-level) conceptions of learning together with b) the circumstances in which lecturers found themselves, may have, in fact, helped to shape the lecturers' conceptions of teaching. Indeed, the results tell us that the students' conceptions may have assisted in moulding their lecturers' conceptions of teaching towards a more teaching-oriented/subject-oriented approach. They tell us, for example, that the majority of lecturers had experienced inconsistencies in their students' learning. This apparently had compelled them to adapt their teaching methods to that of transmitting and delivering knowledge which may have not matched their own conceptions of teaching which favoured a more constructive approach. Secondly, they tell us that the environment in which lecturers operated also had an impact on their conceptions. It would appear, therefore, that there is a relation between student conceptions, teaching environments, teaching conceptions and teaching practices. There are several implications to be drawn from this.

First of all, most of the introductory courses consisted of very large classes with an average number of 30-40 students. From the interviews, it was clear that such large numbers made the task of lecturers wishing to engage their students in meaningful activities particularly difficult. Furthermore, large class sizes meant interaction or collaboration among students tended to be avoided. The following remark of a lecturer clearly indicates this.

> If I have a large number of students, like 45 for example, I don't do any group work. I concentrate on lecturing and questions and answers. Although I do think (student) presentations are also very important, I don't do them (Kate MGT 101).

Second, as already stated in previous chapters, the official language of the college is English, whilst the native language of the students is mostly Greek. This made teaching somewhat dry and mostly constrained, rather, to the basic requirements of the course. The students' limited English constituted one of the most common complaints amongst the lecturers. James' comment is typical of the general reaction of the faculty.

> You go to the class and sometimes you get the feeling they are not getting it. You have to use the language in a different way using simple words in order to make them understand (James, ECO 101).

Third, constant pressures from the students themselves for ready-made information in the form of notes and handouts have apparently 'convinced' many lecturers that this is the best way to teach. Furthermore, Cyprus College is a private college and maintaining profit is a major aim. Therefore the students, often unintentionally, are seen as customers and in a way 'customers are always right'. Indeed, many of the lecturers that I interviewed who suspected their students of having predominantly lower-level conceptions, felt tempted to resort to similar forms of teaching.

Fourth, given the students' limited prior knowledge and over-reliance on memorisation for passing exams (Watkins and Biggs, 1996), most lecturers expected to accommodate their students' 'limited level' of understanding. It followed that many of them adjusted their teaching 'down to their students' level'. 'You have to get down to their level and make them understand' *(*James, ECO 101*)*. According to James, this was mostly in response to 'students' demands'. It is apparent, therefore, that students who hold reproductive conceptions of learning and who are accustomed to a subject-oriented syllabus may find it hard to adapt to a more student-centred curriculum (Newman, 2004; Richardson, 2005).

Fifth, the faculty of the college is evaluated by their students twice a year. Student evaluations play an important part in the overall annual assessment of each lecturer. However, many evaluation instruments, including the one used by the college are predominately based upon a 'teacher-centred' model (Kember, et al., 2004). A typical student rating form, for example, is planned to reflect effectiveness in teaching, and other 'teacher-centred methods' (Centra, 1993: 47). This apparently adds to the pressure for lecturers to teach 'didactically', fearing that their student ratings will fall if they do not. This complies with Kember's et al. (2004) findings, that when faced with teaching incompatible with their own conceptions of learning, students are likely to give lower ratings. It follows, therefore, that such evaluation methods may 'influence how teaching is conceptualised, within an institution' (Kolitch, 1999: 39).

The findings reported in this thesis complete a sequence of relations between lecturers' conceptions of teaching and students' conceptions of learning by describing the connection

between these groups of conceptions. Most specifically, the results gave some new insights into the conceptions and provided some new evidence in both supporting and adding to previous findings.

The categories of conceptions that were revealed go beyond what has been found in the literature, even though parallels of the six teaching and the six learning conceptions can be found in previous studies. (Dall'Alba, 1990; Dunkn, 1990; Dunkin and Precian, 1992; Gow and Kember, 1993; kember and Gow 1994; Martin and Ramsden, 1992; Pratt, 1992; Prosser et al., 1994 ; Samuelowicz and Bain 1992 and Trigwell et al., 1994).

Furthermore, this research investigated lecturers' and students' conceptions in a different context from most previous studies. It provided an in-depth view of how lecturers and their students, in their own unique situation, describe what they see teaching and learning to be.

Most specifically, it contributed to the debate of what constitutes college teaching and learning among first-year students in a local and specific context. The research adds to the understanding of how undergraduate Business students conceptualise learning and where they perceive responsibility for their learning lies. It recognises too that the students' ways of experiencing learning may directly or indirectly influence the lecturers teaching those students and vice versa.

Moreover, this is the first research conducted in the private sector of higher education in Cyprus using phenomenography. It provided qualitative evidence to support a multiple level

set of categories in describing the relationships between conceptions of teaching and conceptions of learning.

Such findings may contribute to theoretical studies of teaching and also lead to practical improvements in introductory Business courses. The results may also have serious implications for faculty and education administrators. They could provide a starting point for further investigation, especially within the Cypriot context of higher education.

For example, the results indicated that most students taking introductory Business courses are more likely to adopt surface approaches to learning (Byrne and Flood, 2004). This outcome suggests that students in the initial stages of their education may be unable to gain deep understanding of Business concepts. As a consequence, they may proceed to more advanced courses lacking the necessary foundation of knowledge, skills and competencies. The study also revealed that if Business programmers and lecturers genuinely wish to foster high-quality learning outcomes in the initial stages of their students' education, they need to develop more sophisticated conceptions of learning among their students. Perhaps more importantly, lecturers must generate a teaching environment that is more conducive to the development of higher-level conceptions of learning (Biggs, 1999) .

Another implication of this work is the need to help lecturers think carefully about what they are teaching, and how it relates to and coheres with the field of Business as a whole. This means that efforts designed at developing and encouraging scholarly teaching need to consider the lecturers' experiences of understanding their subject matter, and help them to

see how their understanding relates to what and how they teach. This is a particularly important issue for lecturers new to teaching or teaching a particular topic for the first time (Prosser et al., 2005).

The results also suggest that lecturers should be particularly careful when assessing their students' work and when examining their learning outcomes. Students often hold 'misconceptions' of the main aspects of their discipline, despite having passed the course examinations (Lucas, 2000). This is because, it is argued, the 'assessment does not require students to demonstrate their understanding' (Byrne, Flood and Willis, 2002: 30). Thus using examination results as a measure for learning outcomes can be a problem. McGuinness (2005) emphasised this in the Teaching and Learning Research Project (TLRP), when she stressed that student assessment is not just a case of 'show me what you know' but rather 'how you know it' (44). The latter determines the quality of student learning outcomes.

The results may also form a source for lecturers to reflect on their teaching and consider what teaching approaches might be appropriate for their particular courses (Lucas, 2002). Self- reflection and the discussion of issues regarding teaching and learning have to be seen as a valuable activity. Indeed, many lecturers who took part in this research stated that being interviewed encouraged them to reflect on their own teaching and helped them to re-evaluate their teaching practices. Prosser (1993) and Prosser and Trigwell (1997) illustrated that assisting students and lecturers to identify their own conceptions for themselves can be of value to both teaching and learning.

Whilst it is of interest to identify the various ways in which these lecturers conceive teaching, of greater interest is how these conceptions may relate to students' learning. If relationships to student learning could be established, as in this thesis, then helping lecturers change their teaching conceptions would probably improve the quality of student learning (Prosser, Trigwell et al., 1994).

Finally, the results propose huge implications for teacher education programmes, for lecturers of higher education in general, and in-service-training courses in particular. The next sections of this chapter make a contribution by referring to the teacher education programmes in Cyprus as well as abroad. The last part of the chapter concentrates on how 'conceptions' can have an impact on teacher training and education programmes in general.

11.3 Teacher Education in Cyprus

There is a general belief that lecturers in higher education will benefit from participating in formal teacher education and staff development programmes (Brown and Bakhtar 1988; Sherman et al., 1987). In Cyprus however, such concerns are given little or no attention in the academic world of higher education.

It is generally recognised in local academia, particularly at university level and specifically at the college where I am employed, that lecturers must divide their time amongst several areas of activities: research and scholarship; service to the college; service to the community; service to the professional discipline and finally teaching. Teaching, therefore, is not widely acknowledged as important. Of the hundreds of lecturers in tertiary education in both private

and public institutions, the number who underwent any formal teacher training are very few and far between. Teacher education and training for higher education is not compulsory in Cyprus. There are few teacher- preparation courses available and most of these fall far short of a systematic comprehensive teacher training programme.

The only compulsory teacher training is for primary and secondary school teachers, which is now provided by the University of Cyprus. For instance, secondary school teachers have to hold a university degree in their subject and are obliged to attend a seven month 'on- the-job' qualifying programme at the University of Cyprus called the Pre-service Training Programme (PTP). The University of Cyprus also offers in-service training for all state school teachers but none for higher education lecturers.

Such courses are seen as insufficient, mainly because until recently, they were not compulsory. Nonetheless, the newest proposal from the Department of Education is to offer compulsory courses for all school teachers on the integration of ICT (information and communication technologies). There are no signs of any future discussion or proposals regarding teacher training programmes for lecturers in higher education.

11.4 Teacher Education: A General Profile

Nevertheless, the arguments in favour of introducing such programmes are increasingly widespread: the need to improve student learning experiences; to enhance teaching efficiency; to increase the use of information and communications technologies (ICTs) and to raise awareness of the impact of globalisation on academic life (Nicoll and Harrison, 2003). But perhaps the most prominent argument remains the promotion of quality and

excellence in education. The improved quality of education, however defined, 'often requires teachers to change their classroom practices, sometimes radically' (James, TLRP 2005: 105), but these ideas can only take place if lecturers 'themselves have learned' (105). Teacher learning is therefore a necessary condition for student learning. To this end, several studies have illuminated the importance of teacher education programmes.

The most recent research published in the UK (Gibbs and Coffey, 2004), studied, over a long period of time, trainee lecturers and their students in 22 universities in eight countries. It concluded that training can indeed improve various aspects of teaching as evaluated by students. Most importantly, however, training can help lecturers improve their students' learning. That is, if you 'train higher education teachers to teach, they will do a better job than untrained ones'(Trowler and Bamber, 2005: 80). In light of these arguments, some countries including Sweden, Australia and the UK are considering the introduction of compulsory teacher training for higher education lecturers. Some have even gone as far as implementing such a policy.

The National Council of Universities (NCU) of Norway, for example, has already decided that all appointed lecturers should go through training to achieve 'basic pedagogical competence', of about 100 hours (3–4 weeks). Progress in the UK towards compulsory training has been slower, and although it was planned to take effect in 2006, has not yet been fully implemented. This policy originated with the introduction of the Dearing Report (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE) in 1997. The report stated that university lecturers should receive professional development training in order to

improve teaching quality and student learning: 'It should become the norm for all permanent staff with teaching responsibilities to be trained on an accredited course' (NCIHE, 1997, para. 70).

On the recommendations of the committee, the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILTHE) was established which became a key component of national Higher Education (HE) policy (Gibbs, 2003). As a result, many universities in the UK started providing teacher training courses for higher education lecturers. One of them is the University of Nottingham which offers the 'Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education', known as the PGCHE.

The fundamental argument made here is that good teacher training programmes should centre on the development of the student, and in particular, on the improvement of student competences rather than the development of the discipline and transmission of the subject. If this argument holds true, then it justifies the compulsory training policy both in Norway and now the UK. Making educational development courses compulsory will eventually lead to 'better equipped lecturers that are able to use a range of methods to develop the competences of a new type of student for a post-industrial society' (Trowler and Bamber, 2005: 83).

However, there are reasons to question the vigour of this argument. For example, there is, as yet, little research which links effective student learning with improvements deriving from lecturer training (Trowler and Bamber, 2005). Of the studies that have been involved in such research, there is no attempt to link apparently positive outcomes for training participants to

the learning outcomes of their students (Radloff, 2002; Rust, 2000). Indeed, in a recent study, Hobson (2003) found that many student teachers were sceptical about the potential benefits of their teacher training programme, especially the 'theoretical' part. However, this does not mean that teacher training courses are not effective, 'simply that significant evidence has not yet been gathered' (Gibbs, 2003: 130).

In summary, there is a surprising lack of a developed theory or validated research in this area (Trowler and Bamber, 2005; Trowler and Cooper, 2002). Perhaps, however, in order to improve learning in higher education, we do not so much need more research into the psychology of learning or the methods of teaching: we need a different type of research (Ramsden, 1987).

11.5 Conceptions of Teaching and Learning: Implications for Teacher Education

An important result of any research of university teaching is its application in supporting staff, especially the less experienced ones, in their professional development. It is suggested that a more consistent faculty development policy based on conceptions would help lecturers to develop and manage their beliefs. Subsequently, the links described in this study between conceptions of teaching and learning will hopefully assist in any future student development programmes. Gibbs (1995) argues for a greater awareness in research into student learning and its implications for lecturer development.

A different way of looking at learning and teaching possibly involves a drastic shift of perspective: a change in the way of looking at the educational world (Ramsden, 1987). This

is undoubtedly different from some previous beliefs about learning, even though it may in the end, prove to be a complementary rather than a conflicting approach. For example, whilst there are no direct relationships between lecturer training and student outcomes (Trowler and Bamber, 2005), there is an abundance of research linking teaching conceptions, teaching practices, learning conceptions and learning outcomes (Biggs, 1999; Dunkin and Precians, 1992; Kember and Kwan, 2000; Martin, Prosser, Trigwell, Ramsden, and Benjamin, 2000; McAlpine and Weston, 2000; Ramsden, 1992; Trigwell, Prosser, and Waterhouse, 1999). Two studies in particular stand out: that of Trigwell and Prosser (1996a, b) and Kember and Kwan (2000). In both studies, it was reasonable to draw the conclusion that university lecturers adopted approaches to teaching that were in line with their beliefs about teaching. Other researchers have repeated the same view: 'Fundamental changes to the quality of university teaching are unlikely to happen without changes to professors' conceptions of teaching' (McAlpine and Weston, 2000: 377).

Research, definitely, highlighted the important role conceptions play in the development of teaching practices. Gow, Kember and Sivan (1992) identified faculty development as an important part of their research of conceptions. They emphasised the significance of 'mak[ing] changes in line with the practitioner's beliefs' (146). Entwistle and Walker (2000) argued for faculty development which would support lecturers to develop more sophisticated conceptions of learning and teaching. Ho, Watkins and Kelly (2001) provided concrete evidence that conceptions can indeed lead to improvements in teaching strategies and eventually in student learning.

So, the evidence is clear: university lecturers' conceptions of teaching are seemingly related to their teaching practices and consequently to their students' learning outcomes. This has led to the acknowledgement that genuine improvements in lecturers' practices have to begin with a change in their thinking about teaching (Bowden, 1989; Gibbs, 1995; Gow and Kember, 1993; Ramsden, 1992; Trigwell, 1995).

This leads to the conclusion that if we wish lecturers to adopt 'student-oriented' approaches to teaching and students to adopt meaningful 'learning-oriented' approaches to learning (Kember and Kwan, 2000), then it is important to direct lecturer development and training efforts towards evaluating their conceptions of teaching and to engage in teaching for understanding (Ho, 1998). An appreciation of university teaching is therefore incomplete without a consideration of the lecturers' conceptions about teaching and a systematic examination of the relationship between those conceptions and actual teaching practices.

This argument concurs with what Professor Ackoff' had to say in a BBC World series which I happened to be listening to on the 5th of March, 2007. The 88-year-old professor with over 55 years of teaching experience argued that 'teaching is one of the worst ways to learn anything'. He concluded by saying that universities should move from teaching to learning institutions and from a 'knowledge imparting approach' to a more 'student-centred approach' (Ackoff', 2007).

It is evident that current teacher training programmes are not doing enough to challenge lecturers' conceptions or preconceptions about 'what learning to teach ought to entail'

(Hobson, 2003). The notion that effective learning involves conceptual change (Ho, 1998) has already gained acceptance in the context of teaching school-age students (Ramsden, 1988; Svensson and Hogfors, 1988). However, in the field of teacher development in higher education, it is only recently that this idea has been taken up with some degree of seriousness. Staff developers have begun to argue that educational development is itself a learning process for lecturers, and effective development programmes need to bring about conceptual changes (Ho, 1998). Even though lecturers' conceptions are known to be inflexible and difficult to change (Fosnot, 1996), some methods for shifting these conceptions have met with some success (Hollingsworth, 1989).

One suggestion arising from this research is that formal teacher training needs would place greater emphasis on the ambiguities which exist between what lecturers and their students perceive as good teaching. Such a process would offer students and faculty an opportunity to express their own priorities in their own words, which could then provide a basis for improvements in any future teacher education and training programmes. In the local context, this would mean investing in specific training programmes to tackle conceptions of teaching. Similarly, workshops and seminars can provide a good opportunity for 'conceptions awareness-building', Indeed, Bowden (1989) designed a one-day workshop which focused on helping teachers to enable their teaching practices to match their intended learning outcomes for students. Trigwell (1995) in his workshop, attempted to change participants' conceptions of teaching by increasing their awareness of the existence of other conceptions which were more helpful to better learning.

These arguments, I believe, provide a good start to any future progress in teacher training programmes. The conceptual change approach has developed as a way of achieving real progress in higher education teaching, even though the actual task of changing such conceptions remains enormous.

CHAPTER 12

Summary and Conclusions

12. 1 Introduction

This chapter summarises the major findings and presents the main conclusions drawn from the results of the research into lecturers' and students' conceptions of teaching and learning within the introductory Business courses. A number of points emerged during the process of investigation which raise further questions for the instruction and design of these and similar courses.

The chapter also reflects on the limitations of the study and considers further suggestions for future research. Finally, a brief reflection on my own personal view marks the finale of the thesis.

12.2 Summary and Conclusion of Major Findings

The context for this study was first-year Business lecturers and their students taking their compulsory and introductory courses of Introduction to Marketing, Introduction to Economics, Introduction to Accounting and Introduction to Management, in a local college in the city of Nicosia, Cyprus. The study centred on seventeen participants, twelve students and five lecturers. The goal was to examine in depth what it means to teach and learn in the initial stages of college education. Six categories of conceptions of teaching and six categories of conceptions of learning were identified and summarised in Appendix III.

My experience of working as a lecturer for many years has made me realise that the relationship between teaching and learning is not straightforward. Not only do lecturers see teaching differently, so do their students. A number of studies has actually suggested that students do not necessarily have a common view of what is essentially good teaching (Kember, 2004). In fact, some of the students in this study described what was, in effect, a 'student-oriented' activity, as 'bad' teaching. This demonstrated that the relationship between teaching and learning is neither clear nor uncomplicated.

The main value in this research was in presenting the lecturers' conceptions concerning the Business courses as being linked to those held by their students. A phenomenographic research approach was used to compile and explore both the conceptions of teaching and learning from the perspective of the participants. Two main groups of conceptions were identified: those of transmitting subject knowledge (lecturer-dependent or lower-level) and those of learning for meaning and understanding (student-dependent or higher-level). The categories were loosely arranged in a hierarchical order – starting from the lower-level and leading to the higher-level. Sometimes they were contradictory. For example, holding higher-level conceptions did not mean rejection of lower-level ones. Participants generally reported holding several conceptions simultaneously. The results were further supported by five emerging themes: nature of teaching/ nature of learning; nature of subject knowledge; approaches to teaching/approaches to learning; role of lecturer/role of student; outcomes of teaching/outcomes of learning.

The study also suggested that it is problematic to transfer Western theories of learning and teaching to developing countries such as Cyprus without considering the local context and local culture.

The findings appeared to indicate that many of the students interviewed hold subject-oriented or reproductive conceptions of learning (lower-level), in which learning is somewhat external to them. Most specifically, Cypriot students saw note-gathering and passing course exams resulting in academic qualifications as one of the most important indicators of successful learning. The study also discovered that Cypriot students consider friendly relationships with their lecturers as vital to their learning. Although the lecturer's role is mainly seen as confined to transmitting or handing down knowledge (teaching-oriented) to students, equally important is their role in building the character as well as promoting professionalism amongst their students. The tendency of the lecturers 'to go along with their students' reproductive conceptions', indicated that they too conceive low-level conceptions of teaching. The findings advocated that the lecturers' conceptions of teaching may have been shaped and influenced by their students' conceptions of learning, as well as the environment in which lecturers found themselves.

The findings of the study expanded our understanding about conceptions of teaching and learning and brought to the fore new sets of categories. It also brought to the fore new themes: the importance of illustrating as well as receiving the subject through easy to understand methods, that is, note taking; the importance of maintaining friendly and positive relationships between lecturers and students; and the importance of developing students into

professional, well-behaved human beings, were categories not identified by previous phenomenographic studies. In this way, the study not only supported but also extended the categories of conceptions of learning and teaching identified by previous research.

To the best of my knowledge, this is the first empirical research investigating both the lecturers' and students' conceptions of teaching and learning in a local private college in Cyprus. It is also the first attempt to examine the relationship between these two groups of conceptions simultaneously in the area of Business Studies. The results emphasised the so called 'lower-level' conceptions, and thus more attention needs to be paid to developing the learning abilities of students, and to promoting independent thinking in understanding their Business courses.

Finally, the results highlighted the need to improve the quality of student learning and in doing so encourage lecturers to adopt 'higher quality' approaches to teaching, through Teacher Education programmes.

12.3 Limitations of This Research

Many of the limitations have already been discussed in previous chapters. However, two particular limitations, partly discussed in Chapter 4, which may affect the trustworthiness of the research, stand out. These are: problems associated with using the interview as the method of data collection, and the actual sample used for the research.

First, the sample consisted of Business students and lecturers from just one college in Cyprus, and thus the findings may not be representative of Business students and lecturers in

other institutions. For example, different interpretations may have resulted from data generated from prospective participants at other colleges. Furthermore, the sample only involved first year students. Although the six conceptions identified seem to be sufficient to allow differentiation between the categories, the adequacy of the proposed set may have to be tested on a larger and wider sample. This further signified the need for caution when generalising the results of students at the second, third or postgraduate year of their studies. For example, more research is needed to include all the years of undergraduate and postgraduate students.

Secondly, given the limited time and resources available and keeping in line with phenomenographic philosophy, only seventeen interviews in total were conducted. Thus, another possible limitation associated with the small size of the sample is that it did not allow for comparisons of sub-groups. For example, gender, age and ethnicity differences were completely ignored. These variables could have provided valuable research evidence. Although this research, for reasons outlined in Chapter 4, contained a small sample, further studies could include a larger population sample, and a cross-section of lecturers' from different disciplines over longer periods of time. How might the conceptions of lecturers' and students' differ in other disciplines is another question needing further investigation.

Thirdly, all the interviews were transcribed verbatim for the sake of clarity in the data analysis process. Inevitably, the question of validity comes to the fore when transcribing data. For example, the interviews were conducted in a mixed code, using both Greek and English to facilitate effective communication between the interviewees and me. However,

the transcriptions had to be translated into English to present the findings as evidence. Translating from one language to another reduces accuracy of data presentation. Although the problem of translation would not have been completely solved even if a second transcriber was used, nevertheless it could have reduced this problem. A second researcher, for example, could assist to re-interpret and analyse the data and the coding of the categories. According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), member checking would have helped to validate the data. However, limited manpower and resources did not permit this. Moreover, the interviews took place in March and May, which were crucial months for students as they were approaching examinations. This provided an additional constraint on undertaking such a time-consuming activity as member checking.

Finally, whilst in general terms, the questions used to elicit participants' beliefs may be considered adequate, more questions could have been added or existing ones modified to extract the participants' views of several additional aspects. For example, the 'role of the students in the learning process, could have been investigated further. Moreover, gestures, postures and facial expressions, which may carry additional meanings, were extremely difficult to note. Therefore, a totally accurate transcription was impossible to achieve.

Although it seems impossible to overcome many of these limitations, future research could explore lecturers' and students' beliefs from different perspectives by employing more introspective and retrospective methods, such as observations, diaries and think-aloud methods as well as focus group interviews.

12.5 Recommendations for Future Research

The value of this study lies in the overview that it provides the different experiences of lecturers and their students of teaching and learning. In doing so, it identifies an outline for future research. For example, more research regarding specific aspects of the experiences of local students is required. A pressing issue for me and my colleagues is the increasing lack of interest and rising apathy amongst the new generation of young Cypriots attending higher education. When I first began teaching sixteen years ago, I was overwhelmed by the enthusiasm which students demonstrated in their education. Today, this has declined to the extent that only half the students attend classes. Trying to understand this problem is of immense importance to me. Further research regarding students' views and experience of higher education may shed some light as to how lecturers need to interact and teach this new generation of students. Exploring the nature of students' conceptions and preconceptions regarding the importance of higher education may form the starting point for future investigation.

The fact that the vast majority of students still insist on adopting a surface approach to learning could form a central issue of future research. Most students attending the college, including the ones interviewed, have come from a school and an examination structure in which reproduction of memorised material appeared to be a very successful and widely accepted method for passing exams. They thus continued to follow this strategy, despite the increasing need to engage in deeper understanding of their subjects. For students attending college or university, it is important that they begin to let go of these 'reproduction' methods in the initial stages of their studies (Minasian-Batmanian et al., 2005). Changing students'

understanding and the way they should approach their studies, requires substantial changes to the context in which learning takes place (Ramsden, 1992). Thus, further research is required regarding approaches to study.

There is still little research into the effect of specified disciplines in the conceptions of teaching (Lindblom-Ylanne et al., 2006). According to Ylijoki (2000), the core of each discipline can be conceptualised as a moral order which defines the basic beliefs, values and norms of the local culture. Ylijoki argues that improving the quality of teaching can only be achieved by influencing the cultural basis of the discipline.

Specific references to the disciplines and the relationship of theory to practice came from writers such as Yap (1997), Rachinger (1997), who commented on the importance of, and the actual unpreparedness of Business graduates for the practical realities of the ever-changing workplace. They all stressed the critical nature of generic skill development so that when students are faced with different scenarios in the workplace, the theory learned at university can be applied. It is clear that much would be gained from research, which seeks to emphasise the discipline context within a local framework.

The findings of this research should serve to emphasise the differences between what academics say and what they actually do in university classrooms. Inevitably, more research is needed to make clear the links between lecturers' conceptions of teaching and their teaching practices. Academics may well work more effectively if there is coherence between teaching conceptions, learning conceptions and hence teaching practices.

It follows, therefore, that a conceptual change to a 'student-oriented' approaches to teaching is part of good teaching, as it is more likely to be associated with higher quality learning outcomes. Thus, the study implies that future teacher education programmes including workshops and short courses should give attention to conceptual change in tackling teaching. Experiential evidence relating to the effectiveness of this approach is still very limited in the literature. Before deciding, however, whether conceptual change should be adopted as a way forward for lecturer development, attention should be given to the question of whether such a change composes a pre-condition for the improvement in teaching practices.

In the end, not only do academics in Business departments need to review the way in which they teach and interact with their students, but as researchers, we have to consider the ways in which we can measure the impact of such issues (Lucas, 2000). Thus the importance of further and continued research regarding conceptions of teaching and learning remains unquestionable.

Finally, it would not be appropriate on the basis of these findings to argue that there are `right' or `wrong' conceptions of teaching or learning within introductory Business courses. It is, however, possible from this research, to determine whether there is room for improvement in this area. Gaining insights into what lecturers and students believe of their understanding of a particular discipline may provide information useful for those responsible for pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes.

12.5 A Personal Reflection

Before I started my interpretive research for a Doctorate in Education, I knew little about interpretive methods, let alone research methods in general. When I attended the University of Nottingham's module of Research Methods in Education in the summer of 2002, I hoped to improve my knowledge regarding these methods with a view to using them in my research work. The course tutor, having criticised the positivist research approach extensively, devoted most of his lecture to the qualitative methods of research, and in particular, the interpretative approach. It took me a long time, however, to digest the meaning of post-modern research, whilst at the same time coming to terms with my positivist background.

Subsequently, I came to appreciate and understand the importance of carrying out a piece of education research. Through the research process, I came to appreciate the importance of 'what' we do in research, but also of 'how' and 'why' we do it.

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First, I have learned to be aware of the factors that affect my building of knowledge and how these influences are exposed in organising and writing up the research. More specifically, I believe I became much more aware about the specific ontological, epistemological and other guiding principles informing such research, and in particular, the ways in which the participants' experiences were interpreted. Second, I came to understand that we can only make sense of these theoretical positions by adopting a high degree of reflexivity and awareness throughout the analytical processes of research (Frith and Kitzinger, 1998; Hollway and Jefferson, 2000). As Guba and Lincoln have stressed, 'facts are only facts within some theoretical framework' (1998 :199). And thirdly, I was able to adopt a more

critical approach towards these interpretations and positions by paying attention to the conditions and limitations in which they were developed. As a 'reflexive' researcher, I have therefore become aware of all these influences and have been able to 'step back and take a critical look at [my] role in the research process' (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004: 275).

Indeed, as 1 reflect upon some of the most persona1 developments I went through doing this research, I can easily identify some of the epistemological and ontological underpinnings that I brought with me when embarking on the research. Before I started this study, what I knew was obvious and 'straight forward'. In my limited understanding, knowledge was in some way universal, and it could be clearly specified. There was little room in my persona1 view for reflective examination (Schon, 1987). 'Reality' for me was taken for granted. These issues formed some of the critical ingredients of who and what I was as a lecturer, but most importantly as a person.

Through my involvement with the research process and with help from my supervisors, Tony (Tony Fisher) and Roger (Roger Firth), I learnt to change the way I thought about these topics and most specifically, the research methods and approaches I was to use in the study. At the same time, I came to appreciate how useful and rewarding it was to adopt a more personal, active writing style.

Significant amounts of patience and determination proved vital for completing the study. Very often, the work became dreary and monotonous. The data analysis chapter in particular proved to be the most difficult, as I was not exactly clear how I was supposed to deal with

the enormous amount of data that I had gathered. Indeed, the research process was continuous and enduring and involved constant reflections of my actions, and feedback from my supervisors and other research students, and friends - especially Mark Minott, who has been a real support to me, all the way from the Cayman Islands - through daily conversations using the MSN messenger.

The heavy work load involved resulted in an educational experience, which although positive in many ways was also physically, mentally and emotionally exhausting. The very real demands of my daily routine imposed on my ability to be a full-time lecturer, researcher, mother and wife. During this period, I was confined to doing most of my work in the kitchen whilst cooking and looking after the children, having taught myself to concentrate amid the noisy clatter of the kitchen. To my astonishment, I have discovered that I could focus and rise above the loud surroundings. Inevitably though, family life was often sacrificed.

However, the benefits of such sacrifices have been enormous. Engaging in such research has given me the confidence to write as well as present papers at international conferences. Through doing this research, I have also learned many skills which I never thought possible. I have become expert in using the PC including several software packages such as Nud*ist and Endnotes. But most importantly, the research experience has introduced me to the world of 'reflexivity' and has given me the ability to examine the research process by revealing its 'assumptions, values and biases' (Wilkinson, 1988: 495). As a result, I am much better equipped to examine my own actions in general and teaching in particular.

What then have I learnt from the activities of the past five years? What kind of changes can I claim to have made over the period of this research? Going through this process has helped me as a lecturer and as a researcher, and I have begun to see 'things' in a different light. The process for me has been very much a 'learning-oriented' experience. The fact that this was the first time that I was able to talk intensively to lecturers and, most importantly, to the students, gave me an insight into their world that I was not otherwise able to reach. As a result, it helped me to develop my own awareness and in many different ways change - perhaps to become a better lecturer and a better communicator.

In a very personal way, I have come to realise the benefits of what I discovered when, as a lecturer, I am able to pay attention to the students, to what they have to say about their learning, and what they experience in their daily interactions in the college. I have also come to learn that when I listen to myself, I become aware of my own predispositions and prejudices, and the effect my actions have upon the way my students think about themselves and their learning. It seems to me that phenomenographic inquiry is very much a process of being wrapped up in the stream of one's own thoughts (Proctor, 2001). The meanings we discover from these thoughts depend a great deal on how we listen and how we reflect. This, in many ways, defines the extent to which we learn, develop and change over time - surely for the better.

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Appendix I

The Lecturers

James

James is from Uganda but has married a Cypriot and is now living in Cyprus. James was about to give in his notice and move on to another career. He had completed his education in Russia and has a PhD in Economics and Statistics. James has over fourteen years of teaching experiences and has been with the college for the last ten years. During the interview, he told me that he did a teaching training course at the university which he found very useful. One of the courses that James is teaching is the Introduction to Economics

Kate

Kate has being teaching in the college for almost a year. This is Kate's second job. Kate has an MA in Human Resources and she is just completing her PhD in Human Resource and Corporate Management. She has chosen the academic route as a career because, as she stated, 'I have tried myself in a non-academic environment and found myself to be an academic …I found academia and research to satisfy me most'. She is teaching all the courses related to Management and Human Resources. Kate was interviewed for the Introduction to Management course.

Mary

Mary has been with the college for the last five years. She started her career as an accountant working in the industry, but found the job too demanding especially with a young family. Mary teaches a variety of courses relating to Accounting such as Auditing, Accounting and Controlling. Like many of the lecturers, she feels that she needs training in how to develop her teaching skills, in particular, in how to prepare notes, exams, and teaching methods as she put it 'how to keep the concentration span of the class'. She was interviewed for the Introduction to Accounting course.

Anton

Anton has been working for the college for three years. Anton is the director for the research and development department and also teaches Marketing. He has chosen to work in the academic environment for two reasons: one, because he enjoys teaching, and secondly and above all, he is interested in research. He described his first experiences in teaching as very difficult:'

> I will never forget the first semester when I started here. It was hell, because I had to prepare everything and had to ask colleagues how to handle the class, and how to understand whether the students have absorbed the material…. So I have learned the hard way. So it would be helpful for me to attend such training courses.

Anton believes that he will benefit from attending a teaching course: Anton was interviewed for the Introduction to Marketing course.

Elias

Elias is one of the longest-serving lecturers at the college. He has been with the college for the last fourteen years. He started his career at the college as a young man and initially he saw the job as a transition period to something else in the industry. He eventually stayed at the college and made teaching his career. Elias has studied Business Administration in USA and is now teaching Management courses. The course on which the interview was based was Introduction to Management.

Appendix II

The Students

Al

Al was 22 years old, and male. He was studying in Marketing and I interviewed him regarding one of his introductory courses - Introduction to Management. He was a shy student but as the interview progressed, he was able to relax. Al has already completed three semesters and he was just beginning his fourth semester. He spoke good English and so the interview was conducted in English. He has chosen to study Marketing at the college for two main reasons as he put it: 'Because I will have good prospects for the future, and the college is near my house'

Yianna

Yianna had just completed her 5th semester. She spend the entire first year learning the English language. Yianna is studying International Business and one of the introductory courses that she was attending was Introduction to Management. Yianna was very confident and spoke good English and thus was able to express herself throughout the interview.

Anton

Anton was a very lively student and could talk and express himself without any hesitation or problem. Anton just completed his military service and was attending college for the second year. He was 22 years old. He was studying Management. The course that the interview was based on was Introduction to Management. Anton spoke very good English but he preferred to have the interview in Greek. One of the reasons he gave when asked why he attended college was to:' find a better job in the future and to get educated.'

Geo

Geo like Anton was very pleasant and could talk extensively without any difficulty. Geo was 23 years old and like Anton, he too has completed his military service. Geo was studying MIS, (Management Information Systems) but was no longer interested in the course and was thinking of changing to Accounting. He attended college because he wanted: 'to study something and preferred to stay in Cyprus rather than going abroad….it is a very

good idea to go to higher education'. Geo has already completed one year and was on his 3rd semester. The interview was based on the Introduction to Marketing.

Nick

Nick was a serious student and I soon sensed that he felt more comfortable in a formal setting. He insisted that the interview be conducted in English. This was Nick's first year at college, and second semester. Nick was studying Accounting. He has already spent a year at another university in Crete studying Political Science, but thought it would be difficult to find a job in this area and decided to come back to Cyprus and study Accounting. The course that the interview was based on was Introduction to Accounting.

Mary

Mary was studying Business Administration and has been at the College for one and a half years. Mary had also passed the entry exams for a University in Greece to study Computer Science. She returned to Cyprus after completing just one month of the course. Although she liked the course, she found it difficult to be away from home. Mary is quite confident and appears to enjoy her present course. She is 21 years old. Introduction to Marketing was the course chosen for the interview.

Sue

This was Sue's fourth semester. She had spent the first year learning English. She is studying Marketing. The interview was based on the Introduction to Economics. Sue, although very shy, was able to express herself throughout the interview using good English expressions. Sue is 22 years old.

Kate

At the moment, Kate is studying International Business. Initially, Kate wanted to become an artist and had actually graduated from an Art School in Ukraine. But she changed her mind later on to study Business. This, she believes, would give her the opportunity to start her own business. She has already completed one year. Kate is quite thoughtful and remained very

relaxed throughout the interview. Kate was one of the few students who worked part time. The interview was based on the Introduction to Accounting.

Gaby

Gaby is studying to become an Office Manager or Business Administration assistant. Gaby is older than the average student. She is 33 years old and like Kate also works part-time. She has completed one year and she is now in her 3rd semester. The course that the interview was based on was Introduction to Accounting.

Demis

This is Demis' first year and second semester at the college. Demis is very talkative and has no problem expressing himself. Although Demi can speak good English, he insisted to talking in Greek so the interview was conducted entirely in Greek. Demis is studying Business Administration. The course which the interview was based on was Introduction to Accounting.

Sylvana

Sylvana is one of the very few students at the college who is married and has two children. Sylvana is fulfilling one of her lifetime ambition - to get a diploma. She is studying Office Administration. As she said: 'I always felt bad because I have finished high School…is not only about completing the course but is also how other people see you, they see you with respect, if you are educated. Now I see a change in my husband and his attitude towards me - that even with the house and the children, I have managed to do so well.' The course the interview was based on was Introduction to Marketing.

Theo

Theo is the last of the students to be interviewed. At 47, she is the oldest of the interviewees. She is a part-time student and works full-time as a radio presenter. She is studying Business Administration. She has just completed one semester and she is currently on to her second semester. She decided to attend college because as she put it, she needed to be updated with knowledge, in her own words, - ' all my knowledge came to the end…that is

until you are 65 you need to get knowledge – and you have to be updated.' The course the interview was based on was Introduction to Economics

Appendix III

Synopsis of the Conceptions of teaching and learning

	LECTURERS			STUDENTS	
Knowledge	Teaching - oriented; Lecturer-dependent	**Category A: teaching means providing and transmitting the subject knowledge** • By transmitting basic knowledge • By using skilful methods • By covering the course syllabus • By making the lesson entertaining		**Category A: Learning means receiving the subject knowledge** • By accumulating knowledge • By depending on the lecturers' knowledge and expertise • By trained and well prepared lecturers • By lecturers who are able to present the lesson in an interesting and entertaining way	Subject-oriented Lecturer-dependent	**Knowledge**

subject	Teaching - oriented; Lecturer-dependent	**Category B: Teaching means presenting/illustrating the subject knowledge so that students can obtain the concepts of their introductory subjects** • By presenting information in a cleared and structured manner • By using comprehensible language • By preparing student notes • By using examples		**Category B: Learning means receiving the subject knowledge through easy to understand methods** • Through simplified notes • Through well-structured slides • Through suitable examples • Through the use of uncomplicated language	Subject-oriented Lecturer-dependent	**subject**
Acquisition of	Teaching - oriented; Lecturer-dependent	**Category C: Teaching means helping students to learn and understand their subjects through assessment and practical participation** • Involving students in exercises • Assessing students knowledge (quizzes, exams, questioning) • Involving students in assignments and projects		**Category C: Learning is studying and remembering the subjects with the aim of reproducing it when and if required** • Reproducing knowledge (quizzes, exams) • Memorising the subject • Studying the subject	Subject-oriented Lecturer-dependent	**Acquisition of**

Learning as	Lecturer - facilitated Lecturer-dependent	**Category D: Teaching means the development of the students into professional, well-behaved human beings** • By setting a good example (role model) • Promoting good relationships with students • Promoting professionalism (role model) • Promoting good behaviour amongst students		**Category D: Learning through the role and actions of the lecturers in the classroom** • Expecting lecturers to act as role models for students • Expecting lecturers to act professionally • Expecting lecturers to understand students • Expecting lecturers to be friendly to students	Subject-oriented Lecturer-dependent	**Learning as** **As a person and as a professional**
conveying change As a person	Student-oriented Student-dependent	**Category E: Teaching means interacting with students, and helping them to develop their own understanding of the subjects** • Arranging activities where students can be involved such as: • Groups • Discussions • Problem-solving projects		**Category E: Learning means being exposed in activities that generate the understanding of the subjects** • Participate in activities as:- • Team and Group work • Providing opportunities for discussions	Learning-oriented Student-dependent	

Learning as	***Student-oriented*** ***Student-dependent***	**Category F: Teaching means building the self development of student into responsible human beings** • Promoting students' thinking • Entailing skills for life		**Category F: Learning means developing students' views <u>and changing them as people</u> in general.** • Acquiring skills enabling students to function in the society • Involving change • Promoting independent thinking through discussions • Preparing for a career and a job	Learning-oriented Student-dependent	**Learning as conveying change**

Appendix IV

STUDENTS' CONCEPTIONS OF LEARNING:

Interview Guide

The interview takes the form of a discussion. Thanks for agreeing to take part. The following questions are only a guide and are intended to find out your views, beliefs, and conceptions about learning one of the courses that you're currently taking (ie Introduction to Marketing/Economics/Accounting and Management). Please feel free to steer the discussion in a way you think best in answering the questions. You are free to stop the interview at any time without any obligation.

Name _____

Telephone Number (optional) _____

Date of Interview_____

Age _____

Course of which the interview is referred to (tick appropriate box):

Introduction to Marketing	☐	Introduction to Accounting	☐
Introduction To Management	☐	Introduction to Business	☐

Section 1: ACADEMIC BACKGROUND

1. **Could you tell me a bit about your present studies? What do you study here? What is your major?**

2. **What led you to attend college?**

3. **Is this your first year. Have you attended any courses/training before? If so, which?**

Section 2: EXPERIENCES OF LEARNING

I would like now to move on to questions regarding your opinion and view of learning this particular course (as indicated above).

4. **How important is this course for you and for your studies in the college?**

    4.1. What would you say are the goals and objectives of the course?

4.2. Is there anything in particular that you find satisfying and interesting in this particular course? Why? Can you say something more about this?

4.3. Is there anything in particular that you find frustrating/dissatisfying in this particular course? Why? Can you say something more about this?

4.4. Are there any problems/restrictions in learning this particular course (e.g. time; number of students; syllabus requirements; language problems; diversity of students etc)

5. Which classroom activities/teaching methods would you say help you to learn?

5.1. Can you give me examples of these?

5.2. Which classroom activities/teaching methods would you say deter you from learning?

5.3. Can you give me examples of these?

6. Do you get an opportunity to get involved in problem solving/real life activities such as discussions, presentations, and research projects? If so, which?

6.1 Do you think such activities help you to learn? How?

6.2 Do you think your lecturer encourages the students to look critically at the course they are teaching? Is this important for you?

6.3 How does your lecturer do that?

7. **Could you describe to me how you go about studying and learning a topic in this course? Let's say for example, you want to study a specific topic that the lecturer has covered. How do you do this?**

7.1. What do you mostly concentrate on?

7.2. Where do you usually study? Why is that?

7.3. Do you make use of the college Library and other resources? When do you actually make use of these resources?

7.4. How do you prepare yourself for an exam, let's say the mid-term exam?

7.5. What would you say is your favour learning/study approach (style)?

7.6. Could you say that you have made any changes in how you actually learn/study since you have been in college?

7.7. Can you tell me about these changes?

7.8. Could you explain why you have changed or wish to change in the future?

8. **How are you assessed in this particular course?**

8.1 . What is your view of these methods of assessment? Do you think they are helping you to learn?

8.2 . To what extent do you believe exams, as required by the course syllabus, indicate your understanding of the course?

8.3 . If you were asked to recommend methods of assessment to your lecturer, which would you recommend and why?

9. **What does learning mean to you? Can we now talk about this?** To help you with this, please look at list A and tell me which point/s (if any) you agree mostly with and which you do not. Why? Would you like to add any other point/s that you think is/are relevant to the meaning of learning?

Section 3: VIEWS ON THE ROLE OF LECTURERS /STUDENTS

10. **How do you see yourself as a student? How would you describe yourself as a learner?**

10.1. If I were to ask your lecturer, how do you think she/he will describe you as a student/learner?

11. **In your opinion, what should be the role of the lecturer in this course? How important is this for you?**

11.1. What is the most important factor that the lecturer is trying to achieve in this course?

11.2. Look at List B and tell me which point/s (if any) do you agree

mostly with and which you do not. Why? Would you like to add any other point/s that you think is/are relevant regarding the role of the lecturer in the process of learning?

12. Is it possible for you to talk to me about your lecturers (without disclosing names)? The lecturers' permission has been granted. However, your answer for this section is optional.

12.1. How would you describe your lecturers, generally speaking?

12.2. How would you describe the relationship between you and your lecturer in this particular course? Is that important to you?

12.3. In your opinion, what constitutes a 'good lecturer/bad lecturer'?

12.4. Think of a lecturer who is particularly effective in helping you to learn (without mentioning names). Can you tell me what makes this lecturer effective?

12.5. Can you think of another lecturer who you think is not effective in helping you to learn (without mentioning the lecturers' names). Can you tell me now what makes this lecturer ineffective?

12.6. If a student has a problem or a concern do you think your lecturer should know about it? Why?

Section 4: EXPECTED OUTCOMES OF TEACHING

Although we have touched on some of the points before during our discussion I would like you to go over the following questions and summarise for me some of the important issues

13 **What do you think should be the outcomes of learning? What is the most important factor of learning?**

13.1. What is it you wish to achieve by coming to college? Why? Look at List C and tell me which point/s (if any) do you agree mostly with and which you do not. Why? Would you like to add any other point/s that you think is/are relevant the outcomes of learning?

13.2. In your opinion, what is the most important factor that should be taught to students in this particular course? Could you say more about this?

14. **What is your view on the role of higher education in helping to produce independent learners?**

15. **Is there anything else you would like to say?**

STUDENTS' LIST

List A **Aim of learning**
1. The aim of learning is the acquisition of knowledge and skills
2. The aim of learning is the self-development of the student
3. The aim of learning is to achieve high exam results
4. The aim of learning is the coverage of course requirements and the syllabus
5. The aim of learning is to understand the subject well
6. The aim of learning is to facilitate and develop students' behaviour/character
7. The aim of learning is promotion and to foster professionalism and good business conduct
8. Other/s

List B **The Role of the Lecturer**
1. The role of the lecturer is to be a role model of good conduct and to promote professionalism
2. The role of the lecturer is to understand students
3. The role of the lecturer is to be a good teacher
4. The role of the lecture is to deliver knowledge
5. The role of the lecturer is to promote students' thinking so that they are able to think for themselves
6. The role of the lecturer is to promote professionalism
7. Other/s

List C **Expected Outcomes of Learning**
1. The expected outcomes of learning is to provide qualified people with good qualifications
2. The expected outcomes of learning is the accumulation of knowledge
3. The expected outcomes of learning is to develop professional people with good conduct
4. The expected outcomes of learning is to develop people who can think for themselves
5. The expected outcomes of learning is to cover the course requirements and to achieve high exam results
6. Other/s

Appendix V

LECTURERS' CONCEPTIONS OF TEACHING:

Interview Guide

Thanks for agreeing to this interview. The interview takes the form of a discussion. The following questions are only a guide and are intended to find out your views, beliefs, and experiences about your teaching one of the introductory courses: Introduction to Marketing, MAR 101; Introduction to Economics, ECO 101; Introduction to Accounting, ACC 101 and Introduction to Management, MTG 101. Please feel free to guide the discussion in any way you think appropriate in answering the questions. You are also free to stop the interview at any time without any obligation.

Name _____

Telephone Number (optional) _____

Date of Interview_____

Teaching Experiences (number of years) _____

Position/rank_____

Qualifications: (please tick appropriate box)

BSc	MSc	PhD	Other_____ (Please specify)
☐	☐	☐	

Course to which the interview is referring to (tick appropriate box):

Introduction to Marketing	☐	Introduction to Accounting	☐
Introduction to Management	☐	Introduction to Economics	☐

I would like to start by asking you some questions about your academic background and your teaching experiences.

Section 1: ACADEMIC/TRAINING AND TEACHING BACKGROUND

1. **Could you tell me about your academic studies? What did you actually study?**

2. **What led you to a career in teaching?**

3. **How long have you been teaching this particular course (ie Introduction to Marketing/Economics/Accounting and Management)**

3. **Have you taught any other course other than this one?**

4. **How many students do you have in this particular class (on average)?**

5. **How long have you been teaching in the School of Business of the College?**

6. **What training courses/seminars/conferences if any have you attended?**

7. **Did these training/courses/seminars/conferences influence the way you approach your teaching in this particular course? Tell me how this occurred.**

8. **(If not) Would you like to attend any teaching courses/seminars/conferences? `How do you think this would help you with your teaching?**

9. **How do you keep in touch with current developments in teaching in your own discipline and profession?**

Section 2: EXPERIENCES ON TEACHING AND STUDENT LEARNING

I would like now to move on to questions regarding your opinion and views of teaching and students learning in one of the introductory courses that you are currently teaching (ie MAR 101 or MTG 101 or ACC101 or ECO IOI)

10. **Tell me about this particular course (as specified above).**

10.1. How important is this course for you and how important is this course for your students?

10.2. What do you think are the goals and objectives of this course?

10.3. Do you enjoy teaching this particular course? Why?/Why not?

10.4. What do you find most satisfying/interesting in teaching this particular course? Why? Can you say something more about this?

10.5. What do you find most frustrating/dissatisfying in teaching this particular course. Why? Can you say something more about this?

11. **Describe to me what happens in a typical lesson?**

11.1 Tell me more about the teaching activities/ methods you use for this particular class. For example, let's talk about…….

11.2. How much time do you think you spend on lecturing and how much time do you spend on other activities?

11.3. What factors influence the way you teach this particular course? Can you give me examples of these?

11.4. Are there any constraints in carrying out these methods/activities (e.g. time; number of students; syllabus requirements; language problems; diversity of students etc)?

11.5. What is the most important factor you want your students to know from this course. Could you say more about it?

12. Describe to me how you go about preparing for a particular topic for this class. Let's say you are preparing to cover Chapter 10 of….

12.1. What do you concentrate on when preparing for this topic?

12.2. Do you prepare notes for your students? Why?

12.3. Do you encourage your students to read the suggested text book /or other related sources?

12.4. How do you make your lessons interesting?

13. Do you involve your students in problem solving/real life activities such as discussions, presentations, and research projects? If so, which?

13.1. How important are such activities for you?

13.2. Do you encourage your students to look critically at the course you're teaching? If so, do you think this is important?

13.3. How do you actually do that? Which strategies do you use to help your students develop their critique of the subject you are teaching?

13.4. Do you encourage your students to make effective use of the college library and other learning resources? How do you do this?

14. How do you know <u>what</u> your students are learning in **this course?**

14.1. What methods do you use to assess your students' learning? (Do you use any other methods of assessment, other than those required by the course syllabus?)

14.2. Are these methods important? Why?

14.3. To what extent do you believe exams, as required by the course syllabus, indicate your students' understanding of the course?

14.4. How do you know if a lecture has gone well?

14.5. What learning means to you?

14.6. What teaching means to you? Can you expand on your answer? To help. you, please look at List A and tell me which point/s (if any) you agree mostly with and which you do not. Why? Would you like to add any other points that you think is/are relevant to the meaning of teaching

Section 3: VIEWS OF THE ROLE OF LECTURERS /STUDENTS

15. In your opinion, what is the most important role model that you as a lecturer pass to your students?

15.1. Do you take this 'role model/s' into consideration when preparing for your lectures in this particular course? Which? How do you do this?

15.2. Look at List B and tell me which point/s (if any) do you agree mostly with and which you do not. Why? Would you like to add any other point/s that you think is/are relevant to the role of the lecturer?

16. How would you describe yourself as a lecturer?

16.1. What would you say is your favour teaching approach (style)?

16.2. Could you say that you have made any changes in your teaching approaches in recent year/s?

16.3. Can you tell me about these changes?

16.4. Could you explain why you have changed or wish to change in the future?

17. Could you talk to me about your students?

17.1. How would you describe your students as learners? Would you say there is a difference between overseas students and local students in the way they learn?

17.2. How would you describe the relationship between you and your students?

Is that important to you?

17.3. How do you see the role of your students in the classroom? How important is this for you?

17.4. In your opinion, what constitutes a 'good student/bad student'?

17.5. If one of your students has a problem do you try to find out what is bothering him/her? (e.g. problems of adjustment, discrimination, language) How do you do that? Why?

17.6. Do you take note of the ethnicity, gender and other characteristics of students in your classroom? How do you respond to their learning needs?

Section 4: EXPECTED OUTCOMES OF TEACHING

18. What do you think should be the outcomes of teaching? To help you reflect on this topic look at List C and tell me which point/s (if any) you agree mostly with and which you do not. Why? Are there any additional points that should be added on the list? Explain.

18.1. In your opinion,what is the most important factor that should be taught in colleges/universities?

18.2. What is your view of the role of Higher Education in the society?

19. Is there anything else you would like to say?

LECTURERS

List A **Aim of Teaching**
9. The aim of teaching is the acquisition of knowledge and skills
10. The aim of teaching is the self-development of the student
11. The aim of teaching is to achieve high exam results
12. The aim of teaching is the coverage of the course requirements and the syllabus
13. The aim of teaching is to make students understand the subject well
14. The aim of teaching is the promotion and fostering of professionalism and good business conduct
15. Other/s

List B **The Role of the Lecturer**
8. The role of the lecturer is to be a role model of good conduct
9. The role of the lecturer is understand students
10. The role of the lecturer is to be a good teacher
11. The role of the lecture is to deliver knowledge
12. The role of the lecturer is to promote students' thinking so that they are able to think for themselves
6. The role of the lecturer is to promote professionalism
7. Other/s

List C **Expected Outcomes of Teaching**
7. The expected outcomes of teaching is to provide qualified persons with good qualifications
8. The expected outcomes of teaching is the accumulation of knowledge
9. The expected outcomes of teaching is to develop professional people with good conduct
10. The expected outcomes of teaching is to develop people who can think for themselves
11. The expected outcomes of teaching is to cover the major requirements of the course
12. The expected outcomes of teaching is to achieve high exam results
13. Other/s

Appendix VI

Letter of informed consent

LECTURERS and STUDENTS

Dear Participant

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. I am currently taking my EdD in Education with the University of Nottingham. My research focuses on the teaching conceptions of lecturers and the learning conceptions of their students undertaking introductory courses in Business.

All information provided within this interview will be treated in strict confidence and will be destroyed after the study has been completed. Your name and identity will not be disclosed in the thesis. The interview will be audio-taped and will take approximately 40 to 90 minutes to complete.

Please feel free to stop the interview at any time without any obligation or bad feelings.

I do appreciate your corporation and hope you will find the experience interesting and an opportunity to reflect upon your own beliefs and conceptions of teaching and learning.

Yours truly,

Despina Varnava-Marouchou